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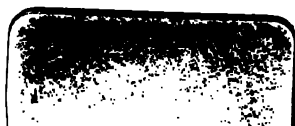
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# THE COTTON LORD.

BY HERBERT GLYN.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:  
SMITH, ELDER AND CO., 65, CORNHILL.

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# THE COTTON LORD.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE RUEBY FAMILY.

THE clock behind the door struck four, having the effect of making Mrs. Rueby look up from her knitting at its face, and then get up and begin to prepare the afternoon meal. It was only a scanty one, but it took none the less time putting ready for that, for the table had to have an extra rub because there were so few things on it, and the position of those same things altered over and over again, and even then the whole was unsatisfactory to look at.

“Eh, but it’s a poor sight for a man as ha’ walked ten miles o’ more,” said Mrs. Rueby, meditatively; “it’s mighty like the cat’s saucer, when she ha’ sopped up a’ the milk an’ just stops to gi’t another polish to make sure. But it was na’ a’ways the same,

an' maybe John 'ull get wha' he's gone for ; though I don't expect it overmuch, for he were a'way a soft sort o' chap, an' co' never say nay when t'other said yea, so I na doubt they'll put him off as they did afore."

Some one outside turned the handle of the door, and Mrs. Rueby interrupted her soliloquy, which she had made in the shape of an address to the table, and said, "Come in !"

A tall, slim girl, with a bundle of clothes on her arm, made her appearance, coming in with slow, tired steps, and, having deposited her bundle on the floor, sat down with a sigh.

"Why, what brings thee back this time o' night?" demanded Mrs. Rueby. "I tho' thee were fed an' housed for the next two months o' more."

"Ay, mother, so did I ; but when I got down to Mrs. Fletcher's this morning, she told me to get back as fast as I came, for she wouldn't have none of the master's hiring abut her, as he always went after a pretty face and a ready tongue, and not a good working hand ; and she sent me back without bit or sup, and I haven't tasted since morning," said the girl, trying to keep back her tears.

"It's thee own fault ; thee gets talkin' an' laughin' wi' the men an' boys 'bout the place 'stead o' mindin'

thee work," said the mother, finding consolation in scolding the girl.

"Nay, mother, you know it isn't that."

"Well, thee doesn't press hard eno': thee takes first word for gospel law, and comes back na' wiser than thee went; when there's many a body, 'specially a talking body like Mrs. Fletcher, as never means wha' she says first sho' be noticed, an' let 'em talk on, an' they'll come round i' time just to where they ought to ha' been at startin'!"

Mary made no reply to this logic, but cut herself a large slice from the loaf on the table, and went and sat on the doorstep to eat it.

Mary was very beautiful: meeting her face among ordinary country people any one would have been startled by its rare loveliness. It seemed a mischievous freak of nature to have given a poor simple cottage girl, whose whole education could never reach higher than ordinary Sunday school teaching, a face that a painter might have made his model for a Madonna; in the depth of whose dark blue eyes a poet might have divined wit, poetry, deep passion. Yet Mary knew nothing of these: a new bonnet, or a nutting party, formed her simple pleasures; a cross word or an empty larder, her pains. Under the sun of prosperity and cultivation, many hidden

gifts might have flourished, and she might have been all she looked ; but beauty expands as well in a cottage as a mansion, and the eyes were none the less bright because they laughed and sparkled at very small wit, and understood a saucy, practical joke from a ploughboy better than she would many a wittier one. The rest of her face was in perfect unison : her complexion was very fair, her nose aquiline, her mouth delicately small and faint in colour ; she had long waving hair of a bright brown colour, looking golden when the light fell on the ripples, and wonderfully soft and glossy like waved floss silk.

This same hair was lying loose on Mary's shoulder then, as she leant back wearily against the door frame munching her bread, and summing up her injuries with half-closed eyes. Mary's notions of right and wrong were not very clear, but she regarded Mrs. Fletcher, at that particular moment, as nothing less than a brute. There were roses against the cottage walls creeping luxuriantly over the door porch, and casting forth sweet perfume to mingle with the soft air. It was a warm, lazy afternoon, and everything about seemed oppressed with the heat : the cows in the field opposite were basking idly in the sun, and the hum of the haymakers in the

field farther off came softly and dreamily enough to where Mary sat; so that before she had finished calculating her grievances Mary was fast asleep, and the bees and wasps were at liberty to buzz and hum among the flowers above undisturbed. Presently up came toddling her two little sisters, who had been previously engaged in making mud pies on the stile opposite.

"Mary's as'eep; poor Mary tired," said one, and straightway began tickling the sleeper's face with a wisp of grass she held in her hand, as a proof of her sympathy.

"Me don't like Mary," said the other. "Mother, me wants to come in; make Mary get up," she called out in her shrill childish voice.

"Look, Mary's laughin'; Mary like to be tickled," as poor Mary moved uneasily in her sleep, under the infliction.

Here their attention was arrested by the tramp of a horse coming up the uneven pathway; its rider, a young gentleman, reined in to look at the sleeping girl, still writhing sleepily.

"Don't do that, you little ones," he called out. "By Jove, what ingenious little fiends children are. Here, who'll catch a penny first?"

The children desisted, but stood one before the

other, fumbling with their ragged pinafores and looking shyly at the stranger out of their little round eyes; not daring to pick up the largess while he was watching them, but darting eagerly at it and quarrelling over it the moment he turned to Mary, who, awakened by his voice, sat up rubbing her eyes.

“I did not intend waking you; I only stopped to tell you your father was coming up the hill: I passed him on my way.”

Mary blushed; it was not the first time she had seen the rider: only that very morning on her way to the farm she had met him, and though he had not spoken, he had reined in his horse that he might look at her.

“You had a long walk this morning,” he said. “Will you give me one of those beautiful roses against the wall? I have seen none so deep in colour.”

She gave him the flower; he, bending from his saddle, and taking it with a bow, put it in his button-hole, thanked her, and rode on, leaving Mary standing in the road, looking after him and wondering who he was. He must be a gentleman, he rode such a beautiful horse, and wore a gold chain, and the hand he put out to take Mary's flower

was so white. Mary looked down at her ragged frock with a sigh: he was so different from her, so far removed, whoever he might be. But Mary was a good girl at heart, and it was only the passing feeling that comes across most of us, when some one rich and happy passes by, and we, struggling with our poverty, look on: we were as poor before he came, but it seems harder to bear a moment or two after we have seen him. She turned into the house to see if she could help her mother.

“Why, Mary, who was it as were talkin’ to thee just now?” asked Mrs. Rueby; “I never remember seeing a straighter-looking young gentleman i’ my life.”

“I don’t know, mother; he only stopped for one of the roses, and I gave him one.”

“Hark, there’s thee father; go to the door.”

John Rueby came toiling wearily up the hill with the two little ones, who had been to meet him, clinging to each hand.

“So thee art at home, then, my lass,” was his greeting to Mary; “I’ve heard a’ about ’t. God help us! But it’s on’y another helpless hand. I see’d Tom just now i’ th’ field, an’ he says he’s turned away next week, or ha’ to work for half his right hiring; so wha’ we’ll do I canno’ say.”

"Hasna' thee got any work, then?" asked his wife, suddenly appearing at the door as he reached it.

"No, I haven't; an' I won't have as long as them red-haired shin-and-bone chaps coom over an' take away a honest man's bread out o' his mouth," he answered fiercely: "they may well work for low wage, for they do nothing but lie an' swelter i' the sun a' the day, an' on'y want eno' to buy a gill o' drink; they ha' na' wife nor children to look to 'em for aught; they left 'em in their own country to starve an' beg, an' do as they can, awhile they comes an' take honest folk's bread that ha' weathered the winter thro', and make 'em fit to curse the sunshine that brings 'em round 'em li' wasps."

The women shrank back at his outburst, and he strode angrily into the kitchen; but the smallest child trying in vain to get up the step after him, called him to help her, and he turned back to pick her up, as though the little voice had taken away his wrath.

"It's a'ways thee father that mun help thee, Tops," he said tenderly, as he bent down to her, "and it seems a'most as if they would na' let him."

He carried her in, and sat her on his knee, while his wife placed the food before him.

"It most sickens t' eat it," he said, beginning to

attack the victuals voraciously, "for I donna' know where the next is to co' from."

"What did Mister Toader say o' thee, then? he seemed to me so soft a spoken gentleman, as i' he conna' say anything hard," asked Mrs. Rueby.

"Ay, he's soft-spoken enou', an' if soft words con fill a man's belly, he'd never let none be empty; but they won't; and when a man's hungry soft words, as is on'y words an' nothin' more, seems to make him raw: leastways when he talks to me o' that gate, I think he's makin' fun o' me, wi' his fine speeches. 'Why, John,' says he, a slappin' me on the shoulder i' quite a friendly manner, 'a great fine fellow like you sho' na' think o' applying to the parish for help.' 'No more I should,' says I, 'but these damned Irish chaps co' in just at harvest time, an' take away a poor man's living;' an' I just turned round sharp an' asked him how he co' keep a wife an' childer on th' wage the master offered me. 'Nay,' says he, 'I didn't mean that; I know how you are fixed; but there's other places i' the world besides this little village: there's big towns, an' factories, an' lots o' work, an' good wage for any man that's strong an' willing.' 'Ay,' says I, determined not to be put down, 'but they're nought to me. I've been i' th' field ever sin' I were a boy, an' my

father were there afore me, an' I don't know nothin' o' big towns, an' what they'd want me to do there, an' maybe I couldn't learn.'"

"Thee said quite right, John," put in Mrs. Rueby, approvingly.

"Ah, but just hearken what he said: 'Leave that to me,' says he, hearty eno', 'I'll engage to make that all straight, an' send you there, an' find you a house to live in, and work in th' factories for yourself and any o' the childer over six; only say you'll go, an' the thing's settled.' What do thee say, old woman?" asked John Rueby, looking over at his wife.

Mrs. Rueby was a little 'taken aback by the suddenness of the proposition; she had thought it likely they might live (or starve) in the old cottage, but the thought of leaving it had never occurred to her, and she wasn't going to answer in a hurry.

"Sho' we take Esther wi' us? she seems a'most the on'y one that keeps her place," Mrs. Rueby began, after turning over in her own mind all the arrangements that the step would necessitate, and lighting upon the removal of her eldest daughter as the most objectionable one to be offered: not that she had any very particular objection to the proposed emigration; but it is the way with some

of us, when anything new is proposed, to look obstinately at the disadvantages in preference.

"Ay, I thou't o' that too, an' asked Mister Johnston, an' he says, says he, that it would na' be fair to take the little uns, an' leave 'em as really co' work behind.'"

"Her missis 'ull be rare an' sorry to part wi' her, for Esther nigh seems to ha' a eye over everythin', dairy in t' bargain," said Mrs. Rueby, contemplating her absent daughter's good qualities with great complacency. "I doubt but Mary 'll never be half her worth t' anybody."

"Nay, now, mother, just leave 'em alone; Mary's very good i' her way, so's Esther. Yesterday it was all Mary, now it's all Esther; but you never did know your own mind sin' I knew you: why when I used to bring you home a bit o' meat, thee co' never tell if it sho' go afore the fire, nor i' the pot, till it were time it were done an' eat."

"Daddy, daddy," cried the child on his knee, catching at the words, "are we going to ha' a bit o' meat? Suky would like a bit now."

"Ay, my wench, an' so you shall, if thee mother says she'll come, an' plum-pudding too at Christmas-time; an' it's many a long day sin' I tasted that."

"Yes, when the stones i' the street turns to plums,

but not afore," said Mrs. Rueby; "who's been telling thee that nonsense, John?"

"The same as told me I sho' ha' twelve shilling a week to begin wi', an' fifteen arter, an' th' other chaps sho' bring in half as much agin, an' more every year," replied John, bringing it out triumphantly.

"There's na gainsayin' but tha's good wage," said the appeased dame; "an' who is 't 'ull gi' thee that?"

"His name's Mr. Candy Miles, as he ha' big mills at Manchester, where Fred Needham co's from. He'll ha' me an' Esther an' Will at the factory, an' Mary up at his own house, an' gi' her one an' sixpence a week, an' her keep beside, an' many a frock too in t' bargain, I dar' say. An' I say, come what will, it 'ull be better nor starving here, so you'd better be puttin' up the bits an' scraps, an' be makin' ready: there won't be so many things arter all to move," he said, looking round the poverty-stricken kitchen. "It looks a bit different to when I first brought thee into it, old woman; but we'll take 'em, just to begin t' other place wi'."

But Mrs. Rueby was not to be persuaded so easily as all that, and talked till her husband fell asleep in his chair, and then woke up again to tell her

peevishly if she could find something better she might, for he couldn't; and so he shuffled off to bed.

"A'ways the way wi' the men; they see one side o' the question, an' think it's the same right thro', an' 'ull go here and there, li' a weathercock, just as the wind blows," muttered Mrs. Rueby, as she put things "a bit straight" for the night.

## CHAPTER II.

## FLITTING.

A COMFORTABLE homestead was Bluefields farm, an angular red-gabled house, all odd ends and corners in itself, but standing in the midst of barns and sties, and haystacks, and beyond were fields of corn and grass.

No grass grew under anybody's feet at Bluefields farm; it dare not make its appearance between the pebbles that paved the farmyard, but had to grow in sly corners where it could. Mr. Southcot worked hard, and saw his men did the same; Mrs. Southcot worked harder, or at any rate made more bustle and noise over it, and allowed no idle hand under her roof. The labourers worked in a cheerful, hearty way, and if there was plenty to do, there was always plenty to eat, to balance the account.

When Mary Rueby came into the farmyard, Mr. Southcot was sitting on the edge of the pigstie

directing the stacking of some hay in the field beyond.

"Want your sister, Mary? she's somewhere up there wi' the missus," he said, pointing up towards the house.

Esther was carrying a pail of milk across to the dairy when her sister met her, and with the usual easy nonchalance with which we are apt to treat such of our relatives as we can always see at command, gave her a friendly nod and went to deposit her pail, before she asked her errand. She was a tall, well-built girl, some years older than her sister, and, without boasting any of Mary's beauty, had a pleasing countenance and a certain look of goodness in her kind, genial eyes, and sallow, healthy face, that prepossessed one in spite of the plainness of her general appearance.

"Well, Mary, how's mother and father, and Tops?"

"Oh, they're well, but father's in a sad way; they won't give him anything at the parish, and they are going to keep him on the low wage all the summer."

It was not in Esther's nature to despond, but this old grievance of poverty that was always at home was a continual shadow on her active life, and kept her engaged in making plans for

some improvement. "Father get so little," Mary went on with a sigh, "and being out in the fields gives him a pain in his back."

"I asked Mrs. Southcot yesterday to raise my wages, and she said she'd see about it, and you shall have them at home as soon as ever they are due; but it will be some time yet."

"You'll want a new frock, Esther, before that, and a new bonnet; you can't go to the school so shabby," and Mary looked down disconsolately at the often patched brown dress her sister wore.

"It will be long before the girls won't learn off me because my frock is mended," said Esther with the quiet smile on her face that suited it so well. "Indeed it was only last Sunday, that the squire came up, and stood talking to me, never caring how poorly I was dressed, asking how my scholars got on. You see as we were taught there ourselves I'm bound to help Miss Taylor when I can," and Esther turned into the dairy to put the milk to cream, so that she might not be idle while she talked.

"Come in, Mary," for Mary was still standing on the steps meditating disconsolately on their position; "you haven't told me yet what you came for. It wasn't to tell me my frock was old, was it?"

"No," said Mary, and, following her in, straightway told her the proposition her father had made the night before. Esther listened with no little astonishment. "They have not decided about it, have they? it is so very sudden."

"Yes; father was half resolved last night, and this morning the gentleman he saw at the parish office yesterday came to the cottage, and made it all easy I suppose, for father gave his word, and sent me to tell you to give Mrs. Southcot notice."

"I wish you had told me before he decided," began Esther, doubtfully; "things often look so different on the surface: but if it is done, why—well, perhaps it is all for the best."

In the evening, as Mrs. Southcot stood over the fire in the large farm kitchen, stirring up the contents of a big pot, engaged in that momentous occupation, "making a pickle," Esther came in. Mrs. Southcot was a short, active, plump little woman, quick of temper as of foot and hand, an adept in all housewifery, and somewhat a smart hand at farming too. There was no one in the kitchen except herself when Esther came in, and she turned round with a jerk.

"Where's Sarah an' Jane?"

"In the hayfield, I think."

"Romping wi' the lads, I suppose. Call 'em in, Esther, will you? no business to lose a minute o' the light, when the days are so short."

It was in the dog-days; but for some folks no days are long enough.

"Yes, ma'am, directly: but I want to speak to you."

"Eh! what! Is the butter gone wrong? it always does when I don't look to it myself," said the housewife, with startling energy.

"No, the butter is all right," answered Esther, with a smile; "it was only about what Mary came to tell me this morning. They want me at home."

"What for? Plenty there already, I should think. Hope you said you couldn't come; 'cause you can't," said the dame, shortly.

"They are going away. My father has engaged to work at cotton-spinning, and we are all going to Manchester," said Esther, with some trepidation, and wanting to get it over.

Mrs. Southcot pitched down the great wooden ladle she held.

"I don't see what that matters to you."

"Except that I must go with them."

"You shan't. If your father likes to go his own

way to ruin, there's no one as can stop him; but you shan't go."

"I must, Mrs. Southcot. I am sorry to leave you just at this busy time, but there are plenty that would be glad of my place," said Esther, gently.

"Oh! I don't want you; you're quite welcome to go if you've a mind. I won't stop you, I'm sure; but you're like all the rest, and don't know when you're in a good place," said Mrs. Southcot, resuming her stirring with great vigour.

"But my father could get no work, and they are so very poor at home," pleaded Esther.

"Ah, it's a'ways the way; you're poor here, but you'll be rich somewhere else, won't you? Just as i' money warn't as scarce everywhere else as here. You can go—can go now, if you like; but you'll repent it: some day you'll wish yourself back again. I know how it 'll be: it looks all right an' smooth now, but wait an' see—wait an' see."

Esther made no reply; perhaps she felt there was too much probability that Mrs. Southcot would prove right, and, having got the permission she wanted, though it was ungraciously given, and not caring to prolong the interview, however hurt she might feel at her mistress's incivility, she went out as desired to call the girls.

It took Mrs. Southcot all the evening to get over her temper, which expressed itself in many little irritating ways ; indeed, the floor might have possessed the strongest magnetic influence, from the way the plates and crocks that were intended to lodge elsewhere dropped and tumbled about. But when it was bed-time, and Esther was wishing her good-night, somewhat unhappily, the impulsive little woman changed her manners.

"Thee art a good lass," she said, with her hand on the girl's shoulder, "an' it's like partin' wi' my own girl to lose you: you must na' take my cross words hard like, an' if you are resolved to go, why, I can't stop you ; but I must see if we can't get some things next market day an' send you away in better trim, an' if ever you get to a near pinch—an' I tell you you will—just send me word, an' if you are at Jericho, I'll pay the fare o' all the family, to have you back at the farm agin."

The emigration decided on, and the day fixed, Mrs. Rueby's mind became a perfect chaos of doubts, surmises, fears, and groundless convictions. It was one thing to leave a good home, and another to get one, she said ; but some folks thought houses grew at the roadside like blackberries, and came there

by nature, and there was nothing to do but to choose which was best. Oh, yes, it was all very well to trust to Providence, she dared say, but she wondered what Providence had to do with houses, and she thought it was good deal more likely to put all of them under a hedge to sleep.

“My dear mother, we are not trusting to Providence in this at all,” Esther said, looking up from the bundle she was making, after Mrs. Rueby had been running on in this manner for about half an hour. “Father says the house will be ready for us when we go to-morrow, and we shall have nothing to do when we get there but take our things and light the fire.”

“Oh, yes; o’ course it’s all right: an’ let th’ men tell th’ tale when they want ye to come along, an’ ’tis all right, till it just turns out all wrong, an’ then why they dinna jist know anythin’ about it. Thee’ll be a queer wife, Esther, as iver I see; if thee goes on i’ that gait wi’ th’ men, thee’ll be niver havin’ a stitch to thee back, much less a bed t’ lie on arter a bit.”

Esther heard this somewhat dreary foreboding as to her matrimonial prospects with perfect composure, and went on with her work.

“We will put each thing, as it is tied up, in the

corner all together, mother, so that when the waggon comes there will be no scampering this way and that to see we've left nothing behind. There goes the first."

"Dinna thee touch that, Esther. I'll do th' clock last thin' myself; I shall think myself dead an' buried a'ready, if I dinna hear it tickin', poor soul! an' they do say travellin' al'ays disagrees wi' their insides, like a Christian, so maybe it'll niver go steady agin. An' the chiny dog, an' little Joe's mug, leave 'em be, Esther; I'd rather nobody meddled wi' 'em but me, as ha' dusted 'em constant these ten year or more."

Mrs. Rueby, while she talked, made a great show of following her very active daughter's example of making ready, but which, on her part, principally consisted in objecting to let Esther do anything at all, but to leave it to her; though when she meant to get it all done was left an open question. Suddenly, however, she desisted, threw herself back violently in a chair, and hid her face in her apron.

"I canna do 't, Esther,—I canna, indeed. I were brought here when I were married, an' I ha' reared you all up, an' I canna leave 't. Put 'em back agin, an' tell—tell thee father I jist can't go, for I'd sooner starve in th' old place nor leave it."

"Mother, it is too late to draw back now."

"I be like th' old tree yonder," sobbed Mrs. Rueby, "that th' squire wanted for his own garden; thee may root up th' young plant, an' put it somewhere else, an' it will grow an' niver know, but th' old tree had its roots too fast in, an' when they moved it, it died. Th' roots o' my heert be set firm here, an' it 'll break 'em to take me away: I canna go, I canna go."

Esther stood for a moment irresolute, and then went to the open door. Mary was outside, twining up the trailing rose-bush by the step for the last time; perhaps if it looked well when the new-comers took the house, they would not let it die."

"Mary, come in to mother; leave those, my dear: perhaps you can comfort her."

"I don't know; it seems hard enough to keep up myself," Mary said, without raising her head.

"It is harder for her than us: go in, there's a good girl."

Mary rose, drawing her hand across her eyes, and went in.

Strange how leaving home affects the poor. We have all in every class of life some such tender feeling when we leave the shelter of years, where trouble and happiness have come to us in turn, and

left in each recollection a strong association with "home;" but to the poor, to whom the world seems so vast and friendless, the little space the four walls enclose is to them indeed the oasis in the desert, that they dread to leave and become wanderers on the world's broad face. Who can say if they will ever find another home?

Esther looked around her with lingering fondness for the old familiar objects that met her eye: the stile opposite, the little brook running beside with its banks of wild flowers, the fields with their waving corn yet green—each for her had its association, each formed the link for the chain of bygone years, and was part of home. Esther had none of her mother's forebodings as regarded their change of life: there was in her a quiet self-reliance that was almost independent of outward influence; whatever came she could face it, and struggle through it, God willing. But nevertheless Manchester had something of terror in it to her. A great black town, crowded with houses, stifled with smoke, a constant whirl of business and machinery, day and night—the very anticipation bewildered her: how could they, simple country folk, jostle their way through such bustle and confusion?

Here a kindly neighbour, with a basin in her

hand, came to offer Esther part of her own dinner, saying, "she know'd they 'ave no time to be thinkin' o' gettin' anythin' i' th' hurry, an' it war ill partin' even wi' stone walls on a empty stomach."

"Thank you, Mrs. Hodge, you are very good; take it in to my mother if you will, perhaps it may cheer her a bit."

"Poor soul, is she very low?" said the sympathetic neighbour. "I couldn't stand it, I knows, t' leave th' place where I war born an' bred. I feels for her, indeed I does; an' maybe, Esther, I war thinkin' jist now, an' no offence, you might be forgettin' to take any garden stuff wi' you, an' bought a root o' sage, an' parsley, an' thyme, an' such like, jist to pop in when you gets ther."

"But we are going to live in the town, Mrs. Hodge, and I believe a very crowded part, and it is not likely we shall have any garden, even if it would grow in the smoke."

Mrs. Hodge lifted up her hands as high as was consistent with the safety of the articles she carried. If this was not the climax of misery, and the very grit of deprivation, she would be obliged to any one who would inform her what was; indeed, so deep was her appreciation of this new misfortune that, though not usually a woman given to silence, it so

overcame her, that, shaking her head, she passed into the house without a word. Esther having thus provided for her mother's consolation, for some time at least, returned to her packing, and so passed the day.

The following morning, the day for flitting, broke glad, and fresh, and bright. To appreciate the country, think of the early morning, before the sun has driven away its first freshness; of the sweet air, wafting over flowers on which still lingers the early dew, the glad light, the thick foliage with its sharp shadows on the path, and the singing birds. Esther and her brother were out very early, almost at day-break, having stolen out by previous appointment while the others yet slept, to go once more to the old haunts, through the fields, over the bridge, and the stones crossing the shallow stream. Esther gathered the last nosegay, and the lad peeped into the birds' nests he had been watching for ever so long, and that surely must be hatched that last morning, on purpose for him.

On their way back they met John Rueby, and at his heels the house-dog Bouncer, a savage-looking brute with only one eye and a sneaking affection for rabbits.

"Father, what are you going to do with Bouncer?"

asked Esther, as they met; "we can't take him with us."

"No; he'd astonish t' Lancashir lads a bit when he got among 'em. No, I be takin' him home."

"Home?"

Esther half dreaded he was going to drown him in the mill-stream; for he was an ill-favoured brute, tenacious in his attachments, but hard to make way with, and besides themselves Bouncer had no friends.

"Ay, lass." John nodded significantly, and went on without further explanation.

The two followed, Bob giving his sister a suggestive nudge to be quiet.

"Will Bolt's come home," said he, in a whisper.

"Has he? have you seen him?"

"I heard him come to our place late last night, and throw stones at father's window: he came for his dog. We shall see him by and by."

"Is it a year since he went—went away, then?"

"Ay, and a bit past. You may be sure he came for Bouncer first thing he got out; but he don't want it known. There he is. Hie, old dog—at him!"

The dog advanced cautiously in front of the party, surveying a man leaning on the bridge they were coming to. At first he trod doubtfully: a

suspicion dawned upon his dog-mind that he was rather incredulous of finding realized, and he was resolved not to be deceived by appearances. The man turned his head, and whistled a low peculiar whistle. The dog bounded forward with almost incredible speed, and leapt into the man's outstretched arms.

A year ago, when Will Bolt came out of the prisoner's dock, convicted and sentenced, there was no wife to cling to him, no children to hang about his neck, only a dog who looked up piteously into his master's face, and whined, with his tail between his legs, when they parted them and John Rueby took him home.

"He knows his master again, does Bouncer," said the man, looking up, with the dog still hanging greedily about him, licking his hands and face. "I's not got nothin' now, John: they don't leave a chap overmuch arter a visit like mine; but I'll never forget who took care o' him."

"He takes care o' himself principal," said John, "and keeps his eye open."

The man laughed.

"Lives on his country, do he? knows he deserves it, an' takes wi'out askin' leave. Ha, ha! the old blood's in him yet."

"Are you going on the tramp again, Bill?"

"Ay, lad; see thee i' th' town, I dare say. Picked up some new chums o' late, an' think it's better poaching i' th' town than th' country; game lies thicker, an' ground better preserved." And with a meaning laugh the man nodded to John, and walked off, followed by Bouncer; who looked back at the Ruebys, as though he knew he was acting shabbily at deserting them, and would fain plead an older tie than theirs as an excuse.

They found Mrs. Rueby and Mary up when they returned; the former was making a solemn consignment of her tabby cat to a neighbour, Esther having failed to convince her that by taking it with her she would be committing anything short of deliberate inhumanity.

"I'd taken it sure eno' wi' me, for I knows it'll fret above a bit when I'm gone," she said, with a sigh; "but the poor thing's delicate as a Christian, an' th' smoke 'ud choke it up dead i' a week."

"Well, I'm sure it's kind of you to think o' th' cat 'stead o' yourself at such a time," said the neighbour; to whom perhaps the consignment was not quite such a benefit as the donor supposed, only she hadn't the heart to say so.

"Ah, we was made to bear; but as to 'em poor brutes——" and the tears started afresh.

But all things must have an end, even packing and leave-taking. The waggon was an hour late; yet, in spite of Mrs. Rueby's prognostications that there was Providence in it, it did eventually come, and beds, tables, chairs, and the old clock were put in; Mrs. Rueby watching the transfer on the doorstep, and not very materially assisting with her well-meant but rather imperative directions as to their disposal in the vehicle. Poor soul, every bump her cherished furniture received had a pang for her; it might be very shabby and poor and scant, but it was hers, and all she had. The few neighbours—mostly, by the way, composed of ragged children who envied their little play-mate Tops the ride—collected in a group to see them go, and made a feeble attempt at a hearty "Good-bye, and good luck to you," as the waggon moved slowly off. Mrs. Rueby sank down with a shawl before her face, and her lap full of little valuables that were "born to be broke if she didn't carry them." And Esther and Mary looked back for the last time at home, with the sunlight on the rude walls, the little porch, and the roses.

"Don't cry, my dear; wherever we are all together is home," said Esther's low, steady voice, as a turn of the road hid the cottage from them.

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Two or three miles on they passed Will Bolt and Bouncer. John stopped for a last word with him, and Bill waved his hat to the "missis;" but Bouncer, afraid of a second transfer not so suitable to his vagrant tastes as his present one, had an objection to any very prolonged greeting, and looked very sheepishly out of his one eye at his former master, objected to come at Mary's call, and sneaked away from Bob's parting caress.

## CHAPTER III.

PROGRESS *versus* PHILANTHROPY.

TEN minutes past seven: the factory bell had rung, and the hands were turning out into the streets. It was a real Manchester night. Manchester rain, that was wet and sleet and fog all in one, was pouring down overhead, and Manchester mud, peculiar for its blackness, greasiness, and depth, was underfoot. There was biting wind, to catch the hands round the corner and find out the threadbare portions of their shawls and coats, and above was a dense lowering sky.

The hands had not far to go, for they generally crowded into the narrow streets branching from each factory, and never thought of getting free of the smoke and dirt from one year's end to another. Perhaps they had most of them lived so long in it that they rather preferred it; and the little children who had been born in it and lived in it, probably fancied the atmosphere was natural, and that the

smoke and dirt in which they lived, pervaded everywhere.

Gilbert Farrel, overlooker at Mr. Candy Miles's factory, coming out amongst the first, diverged a little from the stream that poured out from under the broad gateway, and strode on towards his lodgings. All day he had been amongst them and worked with them, begrimed and oily; but at seven o'clock, he struck out from them: their recreations were not his; he let them go their way, and went his.

He was a tall, stalwart man, with marvellous breadth of shoulder, straight and firm of limb, and strong as Hercules; the work he could do, and the weights he could throw, were recorded at the factory to be told exultingly to new hands by the old ones, and listened to incredulously; and when, in his position of overseer, he showed a lagging hand "how to work," the man, watching the strong muscular arms, would glance depreciatingly at his own, thinking the sample an unfair one.

Gilbert Farrel was a bachelor, and, from his own account, likely to remain so. Perhaps the female spinners, the only specimens of the sex he was brought in contact with, were not generally calculated to induce him to change his single indepen-

dence. A man is more likely to remain a bachelor whose occupation throws him necessarily among women, and whose workmates are women, than he to whom their society is simply an accidental relaxation. Gilbert saw them in their worst phases—saw them for the most part coarse, slovenly, and ill-spoken, ground down by hard work, and poverty, and suffering; he knew that in coming to the factory they left behind them ill-tended homes, perhaps neglected, crying children, and, though perfectly kind to them, and feeling a generous pity for women obliged to do what was far fitter for strong men, he would go home to his comfortable lodging congratulating himself on his freedom.

That same lodging of his was a model of comfort and simple neatness: the sitting-room was only a small one, but it contained all the essentials to comfort—the bright fire with the slippers in the fender, the large arm-chairs, the warm rug, the tea-things on the table, the hanging bookshelves on the wall. Sure some neat-handed Phyllis should have been near to subdue the strong man by little attentions; but there was only an ill-looking old woman, who knew if she didn't look after him she would lose the best lodger mortal woman ever had.

Gilbert took off his wet coat, put on the slippers,

rang for his tea, and settled himself down for the night; the cold and wet outside had only served to make him more sensible of the comforts around him: he felt the genial warmth of the fire and drawn curtains very welcome.

"Nothing like home for comfort," he said, complacently; "this is better than all the alehouses."

But he was fated to be disturbed that night; for he had hardly dismissed his tea, when there came a ring at the door, and a voice he knew asking for him.

"Mr. Francis?" he said, opening the door, candle in hand, to light the new comer upstairs.

Evidently no stranger, Mr. Francis came in, and, giving Gilbert his thick cloak, usurped the vacated arm-chair and bent over the fire, warming himself.

"A wretched night," he said, "out of all season and calculation, and here you are housed and warm and never thinking of those outside. Here I've been twice up this infernal street in the wet to find your place, and you had the curtains so obstinately closed there was no chance of distinguishing it from the other five hundred it resembles."

"I thought you knew the house, sir," said Gilbert.

"So did I, or should never have come looking for

it such a night. Here, go on with your work ; don't let me disturb you : I want a warm."

Gilbert's visitor was Mr. Francis Miles, only son of Gilbert's master, and heir to that gentleman's enormous wealth. Gilbert was almost the only person belonging to the factory he took any heed of, but here he was continually dropping in when he wanted anything done. There was a good deal of liking existent between them, in spite of the difference of position : indeed, perhaps in that very difference lay some of the charms, for Mr. Francis professed himself careless of the society of those in his own station.

He remained bent over the fire for some time in silence, with his brows bent and his hair thrown back from his broad forehead. Philosophical sage as he professed himself, he was always being twitted by his sisters about his dark blue eyes, that were large and full and had long black lashes to shade them, and his brown hair soft and silky as a woman's. Lately, too, he had thought proper to cultivate a slight moustache ; simply, however, to forward his pursuit of science : there was no knowing what dangerous gases he might inhale while over his chemicals, and a moustache was only a natural respirator.

He was a gentleman of no particular turn of mind

or purpose; he was twenty-seven, and had tried most things; having got up a *furor* for each when he first tried it, set to with avidity, conquered the difficulties, and then left it for something else. In this way he had studied chemistry and painting, and interested himself with intricate mechanism: he had studied the first under the great chemists of the day, had travelled over Europe in search of instruction and subjects for the second, and puzzled his father with his inventions in the third capacity. Money gave him every opportunity, and he never spared it; his father did not want him at the factory, and Mr. Francis' inclination seldom led him there.

"What are you doing to-night, Gilbert?" asked this gentleman at length; for Gilbert knew him too well not to have returned to his books and leave him to speak when he should feel disposed.

Gilbert passed the book over.

"Hallo! what's this? Why, my lad, I should have thought you would have had enough of cotton-spinning all day, instead of studying the machinery at night," said Frank. "What is your object? I know Gilbert Farrel too well to suppose he does anything without an object."

"Only a little invention, sir, I've been trying——"

"Out with it, Gilbert: you needn't be afraid of me; I'm too old an inventor myself to interfere with another's patent."

"I was trying to make one mule work twice the number of spindles it does now, and let one hand work the double number, Mr. Francis. This is my plan, sir: it seems simple enough."

He took from the table a board with a sheet of paper tacked upon it, and gave it to Mr. Francis. That gentleman took it and studied it attentively, Gilbert watching him anxiously.

"It would do admirably," he said at last, speaking slowly, and without looking up.

Gilbert's face flushed with pleasure.

"I had hardly hoped you would approve of it, sir," he said.

"I do not," said Mr. Francis, who, with the plan resting on his knees, was opening the broad blade of his penknife, in his usual quiet, leisurely manner. "And you intended to introduce this system into our place?"

"Yes."

"It is not new," said Mr. Francis, with aggravating placidity.

"Not the idea, perhaps; but the way of working it out is, I think."

"Only in being more complete, and, therefore, more objectionable."

"What is the objection, sir? Is it insurmountable?" asked the inventor, eagerly.

"Quite!" was the measured reply; and, at the same moment, Frank had laid the knife-blade across the sheet, and cut the plan in two.

"Mr. Francis! good God! what are you doing?" cried Gilbert, starting to his feet.

The steady knife made a second gash: the plan was irrevocably spoilt.

"Mr. Francis! you had no right——" Gilbert laid his heavy hand on the boy's shoulder. Frank sprang to his feet.

"Right or no right, I've done to your plan what I would do to ten thousand, no matter who the inventor, if they had the same object!"

He stood for a moment with his face flushed, and his eyes bright with anger; the next moment he laughed with his old careless, light manner, and, sitting down, busied himself with burning the fragments he held. Gilbert watched him, breathing heavily, with his face quite white. It had been in his heart to have struck the lad, who had injured him so recklessly; and it had taken no small effort to restrain himself.

"Do you know what you are doing?" he asked, presently, in his low, deep voice; "do you know you are burning what has cost me days and weeks to think of, and work out?"

"I am too old a brother inventor not to know it all—not to feel it all."

"And for some scruple or other, you have spoilt it all," said Gilbert.

"For some scruple—yes; you've hit it: it is for some scruple," repeated Frank.

Gilbert leant his head against the mantel-shelf.

"The work of months—the work of months, spoilt!"

"There, it is finished," said Francis, as he threw the last fragment into the fire. "And now I will tell you, Gilbert, my reason for what appears to you an act of wanton cruelty. If you had been the intimate friend of the gentleman who conceived the guillotine, for instance, or the thumb-screw, or the boot-rack, or any other pleasing little emanation from brains whose owners had not sufficient kindness to use and not to misuse their natural gifts—if you had been asked your opinion, would you have approved, and, if needed, done what a true friend to genius does—found money and means to push them forward, and get them universal use?"

No; you would probably have done with their plans as I have done with yours—destroyed them. Now, Gilbert Farrel, if you had carried out your purpose, and patented your notion, I say either of those men would be public benefactors compared with you.”

He stopped a moment, and, finding Gilbert was listening attentively, went on,—

“I am not a cotton-spinner, so I can afford to think freely and humanely on the subject. If you had begun by making one hand do the work of two—you who profess, and I am sure feel, kindness to them—Grimmett, catching at the idea, would have doubled it, and would have given each hand four mules to attend to. In that case, three out of every four would be thrown out of work, and the fourth worked to death. The idea is not new: I was round Sam Gribbs’s mill last week, and saw one man working five mules of three hundred and thirty-six spindles apiece. The spinners are quite in our power; the millowners are the tyrants, and each factory a petty state. If these won’t do our work at our prices, there are plenty at the gates who will, preferring to die of work rather than starvation. They can’t help it. Here are so many thousand human beings who depend on our labour and our pay; if we choose to double that work, and lessen

that pay, they must submit. They resist at first, and won't work, and our mills stand idle; but a day, or a week, or a month, as it may be, starves them out, and would make them come round to our terms, be they ever so hard. I tell you, Gilbert, if my father were to carry out your plan, I'd burn the place down sooner than it should contain such an exhibition of human extortion."

"Maybe you are right, sir," said Gilbert, slowly. "I never saw it in that light before."

"Then I have convinced you I did not destroy your work without thought and reason. Dear old fellow, don't try to invent for the good of the masters; they have it all on their side already: I never saw such a driving trade as cotton-spinning. Try to do something for the hands, and I'll join you."

"What, against your father, Mr. Francis?"

"My father has made his fortune. His factory is now only a big plaything for him, and it is only from such men, grown rich in the pursuit, that we could expect any philanthropy on the subject, because they can afford it; while a beginner, struggling against poverty himself, must go through the old system if he would get on at all. By-the-by, Gilbert, your plan quite put out of my head what I came to see you about, and it belongs to the factory too."

Now there was business on hand, they were master and man again, and Frank was speaking in his usual light, careless manner; indeed, it seemed even lighter than usual, but that might have been the contrast it formed to his recent earnestness.

"My father has been treating for the importation of some new specimens: they are country people, and will need some little explanation about time and attendance. Grimmett was going—it was just the work he likes; but I stopped him: I think they should be treated with some little consideration at first, and I thought you would deal with them better than that scamp."

"Do you know them, sir?" asked Gilbert, without thinking the question could be felt inquisitive.

Mr. Frank's face deepened in colour.

"I have seen them," he said, indifferently.

"I beg your pardon, sir; I only wanted to know how many there are. I should hardly be prepared to instruct them if I didn't know the agreement on which they came."

"Ah, let me see; I think I can tell you: there's the father, John Rueby, and his son, and the eldest daughter for the factory, and there's another lass, that my sisters want up at the house. But they

are all at home to-night, I dare say ; they only came this afternoon."

"And you wish me to go and see them to-night, sir?"

"Yes, Gilbert: I am ashamed of disturbing you after your long day, but they are due at the mill to-morrow," said Mr. Francis.

"It's not disturbing me, if I can ease the way for them. I have the same feeling as you, sir, about new hands; it's rare hard work for them," said Gilbert, reaching down his coat: "besides," he added, a little bitterly, "you've spoiled my sport for this night at least: it's hard to give up an idea, sir."

"I know it, Gilbert; but it's a wrench many a man has felt before, and with not so good a reason. Give us my coat, old boy; I'll go with you on your good errand, as I sadly opposed you in your bad purpose."

"Where did you say these people lived?" asked Gilbert, as he helped Mr. Frank to put on his coat; a matter of some small difficulty, for that invariable patron of genius, having a tailor of an inventive turn of mind, and always making a point of encouraging him by wearing his "last," often found himself habited in the strangest combinations of cut and colour imaginable. This cloak, being one of Mr. Snyder's

last triumphs, was a most intricate puzzle how to get into, and having a liability to make the wearer uncertain whether he ever wore it twice alike.

"In Oxford Street, West," said Frank, answering Gilbert's last query. "Damn this coat! I'm not in it yet. Look here, Gilbert, this arm has no covering; it can't be right. Here, let's try again."

The next attempt proving more successful—notwithstanding a conviction in Frank's mind that he had got it all in front and there was comparatively nothing behind, which fact it took a good many convincing pulls to reassure him of—they went out into the street.

The rain had ceased and the wind fallen, but it was still miserably wet and damp. The streets had become almost entirely deserted. An occasional alehouse or huckster's shop appeared among the rows of squalid houses through which they were threading their way, throwing a glare of light upon the wet pavement, and now and then an uncurtained window afforded a glimpse of the interior of a "hand's" home. They were generally crowded enough, and poor enough, and most scantily furnished, and Mr. Francis, unaccustomed to have poverty brought so nearly home to him, could not see it as stoically as his companion.

"Stop a moment, Gilbert," he said, pausing at one of these windows where a faint flickering fire-light showed a number of little figures flitting indistinctly about the room. "Look at those children; they seem to have no one with them. Do the hands leave them alone all day like this?"

"I suppose so; but they ought to have been home long before this time," said Gilbert. "Come, Mr. Frank, let's get on."

"I can't: I can't leave them like this. Look at that child on the hearth; its gown touches the bar—it lights—it is on fire! Good God! Gilbert, break open the door—it will be burnt to death!"

As the child's first scream of consciousness and terror rang through the house, Gilbert put his strong shoulder to the door; it creaked, made a faint resistance, then fell in, and Frank dashing in, had caught up the burning child, and wrapping his cloak round it, had extinguished the flames almost immediately.

"Thank God!" said Mr. Francis, as he put the child down: "it's the nearest escape I ever saw."

There were three other little ones in the room; the eldest, a girl of eight, but wearing on her face that premature look of knowledge and care that the eldest of a little family of the poor generally

wears, having lit a candle, took upon herself the office of spokeswoman.

"Mother's gone to th' public down below," she said, "to fetch father, an' left me to mind the childer, sir."

"Left *you*," said Mr. Francis, looking down upon the little creature; "why, you are only a baby yourself."

"Me a baby! oh, no, sir; I'm getting so big, father says I mun go to th' factory as soon as ever Jenny gets big eno' to mind the childer. Gi' o'er that screeching, Jenny, will you? thee ain't hurt. Her ain't hurt, be her, sir?"

Jenny, a pretty little thing of five years old, was the one Frank had saved, and who, now the first excitement and extreme terror had passed, found the flames had burned her arm, and was crying. Frank took the child on his knee, and tenderly removed the little scorched sleeve, while Gilbert despatched the eldest girl for the mother: an errand on which she only consented to depart on receiving his earnest promise to "mind th' childer" while she was away; in proof of which he received the baby she held in her arms, and instantly conceived an insupportable wish to be rid of again.

"Poor little maid, I am afraid it smarts very much; let me see if I can find anything to cure it," said Frank, whose notion of children and crying was invariably associated with unlimited largess in the shape of pennies: he began searching his pockets. "Look here, Jenny; one, two, three, four—ever so many," he said, pouring a handful in her lap, and watching the child's eager look with pleasure. Her face became a study for him in its brightened look, and the demure prudence with which she hugged up her treasure on the appearance of two other little ragged claimants out of a dark corner.

"Wait a bit, Tom; Jane'll divide," said the capitalist, gathering up the pence one by one in her little hands, and portioning them out quite fairly.

"Isn't it frightful, Gilbert?" said Mr. Francis, turning to his companion for the first time: "think of leaving these little ones by themselves all day; they might all be burnt to death, and nobody the wiser."

"But how would you prevent it, sir?"

"I wouldn't have women in the factories at all; let them stop at home, and look after the children."

Gilbert, practical manager, shook his head at the suggestion of the theoretical amateur.

"I wish the woman would come in now, though; I'm afraid of dropping this child," he said, holding the baby in his immense arms, as though he feared it might collapse at any moment, and drop through.

Frank could not help laughing, and looked up to see the "large gentleman holding the baby;" and here Gilbert's faithful little emissary returned, bringing back the mother.

She was a poor, weak, ailing-looking woman, and dropped a curtsy to the gentlemen as she took her child from Mr. Francis.

"I hadn't left 'em for a minute, sir, just wi' I fetched Tom; an' it's very hard for 'em to get int' mischief so."

"Here, my good woman, don't cry, the child is very little burnt; but it might have been very much worse," said Francis, rising to be off.

"God bless you for your kindness, sir," said the woman, breaking down.

Frank could not bear tears.

"Come, come, don't thank me; I'm very glad the child's no worse," and, putting a sovereign in her hand, he turned away. "Come, Gilbert, we shall be late."

But it was not so easy for Gilbert to make off; the baby being a sad fixture, and the woman too

much occupied with her gratitude to notice his position. However, his little friend came to his aid, and pocketing the sixpence that was returned with the baby, released him, as well satisfied with the bargain as was Gilbert himself.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE NEW HOME.

OXFORD STREET WEST was by no means one of the best in the neighbourhood. The houses themselves were small and newly built, and fronting them was a waste unoccupied ground, covered with heaps of dirt, brick ends, and miscellaneous rubbish. Across this ground, at some distance from the houses, stretched the railway arches, triumphs of sturdy architecture, and the frequent engines passing on the line sent volumes of white steam upon the house-tops.

One of them passed as Mr. Francis and Gilbert turned the corner of the street, and the former stopped to watch it, as it sped its way through the darkness. It was one of the peculiarities of that young gentleman that everything interested him: he could never have been *ennuyé*; he knew a little of most things he came in the way of, and was always seeking in his curious fantastic way to

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put down on the floor directly, while her mother made up for her past neglect.

"Dear heart, sir, I beg ye pardon,—I don't know how to forgive myself: please to sit down. Really I co' ha' no idea it was Mr. Candy Miles, you kep' i' the dark so, sir. Esther, wipe down that chair first."

"Thank you, I will not sit down; it is my father you mistake me for," said Mr. Francis, laughing.

"Lord, sir! now how could I, you bein' so young, too; I beg your pardon agin: o' course it couldn't be ye honoured father. An' you wanted Mary, did you? She's upstairs: go an' ca' her, Esther. Did you say, sir, th' ladies wanted my girl up to-night?"

"Oh, no, let her come when you like; I daresay she will be useful to you the first day or two, to get straight."

"Thank ye, sir, ye very kind; but I don't think I shall ever get straight i' this place: why, it's as damp, beggin' ye pardon, sir, as a new-washed cow-house."

While Mrs. Rueby was talking, Mary came down the stairs that led into the kitchen, and the eyes and face Mr. Francis had so longed to see flashed upon

him again. He had expected to be disappointed: had said to himself she could never look so beautiful as on that evening asleep on the doorstep in the soft light of fading day; but it seemed now almost more lovely, lit up by the candle in her hand. Mary knew him again, and blushed so deeply as to recall to Frank the fact that he was staring at her in a most unusual manner.

“Good evening, Mary,” said that gentleman, who, in consequence of the republican feelings he always professed as to the marked distinction made between the higher and lower classes, was always a little puzzled how to treat poor folks when he wished to appear friendly.

Mary gave him a deep curtsy, and her mother hastened to introduce her in a proper manner.

“You must please to beg your sisters, sir, t’xcuse my girl just at first, if she’s a little strange at things; everybody’s at first—I was myself. I remember when I went to service—Lord on’y knows how many years ago—an’ I got so bothered wi’ one thin’ an’ t’other, I sat down an’ had a good cry over ’t. But she’s willin’, sir, an’ ready t’ oblige, I’m sure, sir.”

“I think she will find my sisters kind,” said Mr. Francis, with an exquisite sense of the absurdity of his position. “By Jove! I might as well be

in a register office," thought he, listening to all Mary's good qualities. "How Margaret would laugh at me."

"Thank you, sir; I'm sure she will," ran on Mrs. Rueby. "Your true ladies is good t' the servants, an' feel for 'em most kindly; it's on'y them, as I tell Mary, that's sprung from nothin' that ill-treats 'em: though you might ha' thought them as ha' been servants themselves would ha' been kinder; but it is na so, I can tell you, sir. Here, Mary, take Tops to bed; you needn't go to-night, the gentleman says."

"Oh, no; don't think of it," Frank said; "I only came down with Gilbert to see that you were all right. Come, Gilbert, we must be off."

"I'm quite ready," said Gilbert, turning round, "if you are, sir. Let me see, Mrs. Rueby, which is the one that is coming to the factory to-morrow with her father?" he asked, examining the two girls as they stood together with his critical eye: an eye that so far differed in taste from Mr. Frank's that it expressed itself gratified when Mrs. Rueby signified Esther.

"Are you going to spin?" exclaimed Frank, with very unbusiness-like concern. "Surely you had better stop at home with your mother."

"My mother does not need me, sir," said Esther, quietly. "I'm used to work."

"Ah! but not to spinning," said Mr. Francis, turning away. "Well, come and try how you like it. Good-night."

"Good-night, sir."

Frank caught another look at Mary before he went, and then followed Gilbert out, with a feeling strong in his mind that he had conducted his visit in a most unbusiness-like manner.

"I can't manage these things as you do, Gilbert," he said, with a laugh; "you are a better business-man than I am: why, I felt quite sorry that healthy-looking country lass should be bending over a spindle in our factory."

"You are not used to it, sir: you would spoil any trade if you brought such kind notions into it."

"I'm not so sure of that, Gilbert; if I began fairly with capital, and was content with small and reasonable profits, I should find a large margin for consideration and kind-heartedness to the hands. I don't mean to say I should get on as Gribbs at Wigan does, who makes one hand do the work of five, and boasts he pays for all his dinner-parties with the fines he puts on his wretched work-people."

Gilbert smiled at the generous-hearted young fellow while he expounded his very uncommercial views, and did not care to disturb the satisfaction that such feelings imparted to the young man. He did not tell him how much really needed reform under his own hand, in his father's factory; what an opportunity lay there for carrying out his generous plans. Perhaps Gilbert thought it was just as well he should not try.

"Well, good-night, old fellow—this is my way; and, I say, be kind to that demure young woman, Esther."

Gilbert nodded, and they parted. Mr. Francis, hailing the first cab he came to, rode home.

"It is a beautiful face," he said, thinking of Mary; or rather of her face (mind the difference, reader, for ours is a steady young man, and his admiration quite professional), "so strangely pure in colour and expression. How charming she looked, dropping that humble curtsey to me, and veiling those bright eyes as though I were lord of creation and she my serf. Charming little Mary! I'll go back to my painting, and put my chemicals away for a time; I wanted a new subject, and I'll begin a large canvas with Mary for the principal figure: she'd make a delightful figure, and I'll get her to sit to me. My old master

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always said I ought to devote myself to figure painting; and I think, by Jove! he was right: I never felt half so enthusiastic at anything as I do about this. I'll make it my study, and see if I can't turn out a creditable performance."

## CHAPTER V.

## MADAPOLLAM HOUSE.

THE fire was burning low in the gallery, and the day closing in. By the dim light Mr. Candy Miles might have been seen coiled up in his great arm-chair taking his after-dinner nap. He was so small, and the chair was so large, that he more closely resembled a cushion in his position than anything else; the more so that he had laid aside his coat for a gaily coloured dressing-gown, and its loose folds failed to preserve a very distinct outline of his figure.

Mr. Candy Miles had made a fortune, and was a very rich man; but there was cotton in it from beginning to end. Thirty years ago he had come from Wigan a poor man, and cotton had begun it for him on the third story of a tottering pile of factory buildings, within whose smoke-begrimed walls the working power groaned and creaked, and kept on serving the different ends of the occupants of each storey from one year's end to another; helping to make

the groundwork of so many fortunes that it seemed ungrateful it was not pensioned off at last, and given a holiday.

When Candy Miles left the third storey and got a little factory, he was a proud man, and an anxious one too; and at night that astute, hard-working little man, whom people pointed out as getting up in the world, had used to go to his poor home, and in its privacy to roll about with his hands clenched upon his head crying out, "It was no good; they wouldn't let him get on, and he was falling, falling." It must have been those times that left those deep lines upon his forehead, and had given his face that look of anxious care, that all the after years of prosperity and ease could never efface. Ah, well! there was a kind wife by him then, who cheered him, and brought back his trust in himself. She was everything to Candy then: she worked for him at his factory, she kept his home neat for him, she took what of the burden she could on her own shoulders, and bore it bravely, and, better than all, cheerfully; not letting people know how thoroughly his anxieties and cares were hers, till the tell-tale lines came on her face too, and the grey streaks in her hair.

It was a hard struggle; but he got through it: he toiled manfully up the hill to fortune, and when he

reached it a white-headed man, and stopped to take breath after the heavy pull and look round him, the prospect was very cheerful. A large manufactory was doing the work that had been begun on that third storey; had been doing it for some time past, and prosperously too. He had a fine house, and a fine carriage; his name stood good at the bank for sums of whose amount people only whispered: in fact, he had reached the top, and was a rich man.

His wife was dead. When the struggle ceased, and the harvest came pouring in beyond what her highest hopes had ever pictured, perhaps she was disappointed. Who of us that has worked a lifetime with one object in view, and having gained it, finds the result worth the effort? Does it realize all we imagined it, or appear all we thought it? Do we not look back at the struggle itself, and think we were happier then than now we have attained the end?

Ten years had elapsed between that time and now when the master lay coiled in his chair in the fading light, and Mr. Candy Miles was still a widower.

When he awoke it was quite dusk, and the fire—though it had not dared to go out in the interval that had elapsed since the last attention bestowed upon it—having burnt out all the fuel in its way, had settled

itself down into a few red embers. Mr. Candy Miles hated being in the dark, and, moreover, waking up chilly, rang the bell violently the moment he perceived the state of things, and then resorted to his favourite means of summons, a shout.

“Rascals!”

It was a peculiar call, very short, and loud, and abrupt, but having the advantage of being heard all over the house.

His man-servant, who was half valet, half butler to him, answered the summons.

“Light the candles.”

“Yes, sir.”

The master watched him while he did it, and the man felt he was being watched: a constant consciousness of being watched while in his presence had given the man a nervous, suspicious appearance, and made him appear to merit the name which the master preferred to call him by, rather than the one his godfathers and godmothers gave him, as being more appropriate.

“Anybody been for me, Rascals?”

“No one, sir.”

“Anybody in the drawing-room?”

“The ladies and Mr. Francis, I believe, sir.”

“Look to the fire; get some coal and some wood.”

Rascals disappeared, and returned with a handful of chips and the coal.

"I said get some wood: do you call that wood?" said the master. "Some logs! Don't tell me you haven't got any. Get some; break up the summer-house, or your own boxes: you'll want bigger ones to take away your things than you did to bring them here, I know."

Rascals had a sly face, with a cowardly, craven look on it, and he turned an eye full of slinking craftiness on the master as he turned to do his bidding.

"I must give that fellow the sack; he gets too good for his work," said the master, walking up and down his large gallery, now lit up and brilliant with a dozen lights. Amid all that wealth of art—pictures representing *chef-d'œuvres* of great men's lives—pictures the culmination of many a life's work, and from which the next step was a decline—pictures by which life-lasting reputations had been achieved—amid all those, crowded from floor to ceiling, the little cotton-spinner strode to and fro whistling. He loved them, but he had no veneration for them; perhaps he had known the painters who did the work, and seen them over it, and, taking their measurement in his cool, critical manner, had admired that work and paid heavily for it when

done, but saw no reason to bend his republican knee before the workmen, and had whistled and criticized in their studios, as he was doing now in his own gallery. That sea piece with the blood red sun reflected on the stormy waves, tinging them as though with blood, would look better above the line instead of below it; and that one, all air, and mist, and cloud, and shadowy forms, would do in its place.

Rascals now returned with the wood, and proceeded to make up the fire, and a few seconds after Mr. James Hall was announced.

The master was standing with his back to the door when he came in, and did not turn. Mr. Hall walked to the fireplace, and waited till Rascals had gone.

“Good evening, Mr. Miles.”

The master nodded, moved on a step to a neighbouring picture and studied that.

“Fine thing, that: the effect of light on the girl’s face is beautiful,” said Mr. Hall, by way of breaking the silence.

“Always looking at the gals,” sneered the master.

“I thought you were studying Ruth, too: but I like a beautiful face. By the by, Miles, I saw a face to-day in your hall to beat that.”

"Did you? I oftener get a face more resembling *that* in my hall," retorted the master, pointing to a Judas Iscariot, looking down upon them from above.

"Ah, but you know who I mean: a most charming face; a servant, I suppose."

"One of my last importations from the country," said Mr. Miles. "I dare not take a girl from the factory into my house, and generally have them direct. Will you have coffee, or wine, Jim?"

"I'd rather have some brandy and water. No, thank you; I will make it myself. But, Mr. Miles, seriously, you were speaking of importing hands from the country; do you think it is right?"

"Do you think it's wrong?"

"If they come with false impressions and are misled, I really think it is," replied Mr. Hall; "say a man leaves his work, his plough, or his farm, sells off his furniture, and comes down here to get twelve shillings a week——"

"Have thee been studyin' the price list lately, Jim?" interrupted the master, affecting the peculiar quaintness of speech that time back had been naturally his own, but which close companionship with educated men had in some measure banished.

"No, but I don't think I am far wrong. Well,

supposing this man leaves his country, where he has lived from a boy, and where his father lived before him, to come and get this miserable pittance, and endure the foul air, and the confinement, and the dirt."

"What does he come for, then? We ain't slave-drivers. He comes because he can't get work anywhere else, and if he didn't he'd starve."

"But do you think he always knows what he is coming to? Do you think your agents always represent the case as it is—fairly?"

"My agents!" cried the master, with an excitement that might turn to wrath or mirth, at very little extra provocation. "Damn it, Jim! do you think I've got agents all about the country, to snap up poor ignorant fellows and get a commission on 'em: bring 'em in bags so much a dozen, eh, Jim? No, my lad, you keep to your books, and don't meddle with the hands; you can't do 'em any good."

"I think they are capable of a good deal of improvement," persisted Mr. Hall, "and instead of sending out missionaries to teach Christianity to the Hindoo, I shall in future send them to teach cleanliness and sobriety to the "hands," as you call them, Mr. Miles."

"You'll have your windows broken if you do," retorted the master, "and I advise you to steer clear of 'em. You arn't the first that's thought o' such things: chaps are always coming down, and putting their noses into our places, and setting up a groaning about what they see there; and then they all meet, and have a dinner, and go back, and p'raps some of 'em writes a book, and tells the hands that us masters are devils, and grinding 'em down body and soul: but the hands arn't the better for it, and they'll serve the devil till the angels pay 'em better for their work."

"But, perhaps I should set about it in a different way, and succeed where they have failed," said Mr. Hall, energetically. "I was down among them this morning: at least among their houses, for they were at work, of course; and in most there was only some old crone left, too old to work, or some child too young was left to mind them: my God! Miles, I came back sick at heart. It's wrong; I'm sure it's wrong."

"What is? what's wrong? what can I do?" asked the master, resuming his old walk, a little impatiently now. "Mind your own business, Jim, and don't come tumbling down upon men who can think and feel as well as you can."

"I wasn't speaking of you, nor any of the masters. I know you can't pay more than the trade price; but it is not a rise of wage I want: I want to keep so many hands from being idle; and every man you bring from elsewhere takes the bread from an old hand, and throws him penniless upon the world."

"If they hadn't refused to do the work, or struck for higher pay, they wouldn't be out of work; or else they get disabled, or ill, through one excess or another, and it does not do to have a factory too much like a hospital."

"I don't advocate that. I dare say you know more about it than I do."

"Hallo, Jim! I should rather think so," put in the master, with his little gray eyes twinkling maliciously.

"Still, not being a master," pursued Mr. Hall, sturdily, "I have the advantage of an unbiassed judgment——"

"And an ignorance of everything concerning it!" cried Mr. Miles. "Here, stop, Jim. Rascals!"

Mr. Hall might have had an idea that the valet was summoned as an interruption; but he submitted with a sigh, and an inward resolve to resume when an opportunity offered.

"Did you call, sir?"

"Where did that poker come from?" asked Mr. Miles, in an attitude closely resembling Buonaparte's favourite one, and pointing to a handsome new poker in the fender.

"Miss Eliza bought it yesterday, sir," the man said, timidly.

"Where's my old one?"

Rascals was silent. Mr. Hall, looking at him, felt a moral conviction that it was by this time exhibited on a broker's stall.

"Where's my old poker?" repeated Mr. Miles, with a growing tendency to storm.

"I—I did not think you'd want it again, sir," stammered Rascals.

"Who told you to think anything about it? I suppose I can think for myself, can't I—and speak too, when I like. It isn't the worth of the poker—I'll buy fifty pokers to-morrow—but I won't have my things touched. You'll be taking my pictures next, I suppose, and thinking I was tired of *them*. If you've sold the poker—and I suppose you have—you shall go to-morrow and buy it back: I don't care what you pay for it, I'll have it back: do ye hear?"

"Yes, sir; but, if you please, I—I don't know

where it's gone to. I sold it to—to a person at the door, and he may be out of the town by this time."

Rascals got through this speech with difficulty, looking the while like a dog apprehensive of a blow.

"I don't care where it's gone, I'll have it back, if you've to hunt the town over for it: do you understand? I'll have it back—back!"

Yes, Rascals understood; and please was there anything more?

"No, you may go," and Rascals, gladly availing himself of the ungracious permission, went.

"I won't have it—I won't have it," repeated Mr. Miles, with a word for every step: "they think Candy's a fool, and he isn't."

A few seconds after, a heavy step was heard in the hall, and a loud voice asking if the master were in.

"There's Wills," said the master, hearing the noise, and looking half inclined to be "out" to the new comer; but any such intention was instantly frustrated by the intruder throwing open the door.

"Ah, master, master, how do you do? Knew you were in, though that Rascals wanted to come and see: saw your comforter—that comforter that speaks to me more of my illustrious friend than a volume of words—in the hall."

He was a tall, fine-looking man, in whose dress there appeared a somewhat undue preference given to large voluminous folds of drapery, which he was fond of getting to hang round him with majestic fulness.

"Didn't know you were in town," replied the master, a little ungraciously.

"Not know I was in town," returned Mr. Wills, who fancied he never looked bigger or more important than when he stood at the little cotton-spinner's elbow, and so got as often as he could in that vicinity. "No, most probably not. Benjamin Wills does not require trumpeters to herald his approach: he comes with an object, he succeeds, and he is gone."

"What is Mr. Benjamin Wills' mission to-day?" asked the master, with a smile that had too much of a sneer in it to be flattering.

"First to see his noble friend, which he has done—succeeded as usual—and to buy his memorable comforter to keep under a glass shade, as the nearest impersonation of a great man possible to procure."

Mr. Wills was not clever at some things, or he would have left that comforter alone; it being a very old worsted one of divers colours that Mr. Miles wore in the garden, regardless of its dilapidated condi-

tion. Other comforters had been bought, and lady friends had worked him several in the most elaborate fashion; but they were to be seen lying about the gallery at that moment, never worn and never noticed since the time of presentation, having proved inadequate to seduce him into a transfer of his affections.

It would be difficult to say of what trade or profession Mr. Benjamin Wills was at that time; he called himself a picture-dealer, though it is certain he was not recognized as a member of that extensive fraternity, and looked upon jealously in consequence; but, nevertheless, he every now and then came to the surface with some large work by a celebrated master, that no one could say where he got it from, but for which notwithstanding he got his price (generally a high one), after parading it in the faces of all lookers-on.

A little time back he had kept a coffee and bun shop: Wills' Coffee House he called it, and was proud of it; where Mrs. Wills presided in gorgeous costume, and if the gentlemen were great friends, why there was a snuggerly for them at the back where a few very choice cigars might be got as a great favour; and occasionally some "exquisite little gem" (according to Mr. Wills) of a drawing or picture, or now and then a costly teacup and saucer,

were disposed of in a quiet way, behind that baize door.

Most probably the profits realized on these small transactions first gave Mr. Wills the idea of turning trader altogether in art: at any rate, he gave up the coffee-house, took Mrs. Wills up to London, and from that time hence, whenever quiet picture men dropped into an artist's studio to see if their last commission were progressing, they were pretty sure to find Mr. Wills' red-wheeled dog-cart at the door, and Mr. Wills in the studio; and unavoidably meeting him thus, were sure to be greeted by him next day as old friends, most probably hailed by their Christian names. They did not like it, and called it insufferable impudence; but, worse than knowing them, he got to know their customers: rich collectors of pictures, whose acquaintance it had taken *them* months to make and years of careful courtesy to continue, he knew directly, and was slapping them on the shoulder two days after.

In this way he got to know Mr. Candy Miles; he met him on the stairs one day, spoke to him the next, procured a call at his rooms on the third, and sold him a picture on the fourth: he was most undoubtedly a clever man in his way, they admitted.

It was a mystery why Mr. Candy Miles endured

him; he could not like him surely, yet he always got admittance at Madapollam House gallery, and generally effected a sale with the owner.

He had come on the present occasion to offer the master a Müller. "A splendid thing, in his best time, magnificent in colour."

"How big is it?" asked the master, who knew sufficient of Mr. Wills to take off a very considerable percentage from the encomiums he applied to his own property. Mr. Wills had by this time divested himself of his outward flowing garments, and was seated.

"Five feet by three."

"Very early, I suppose."

"Early, but not too early; just when he was in his prime: that choice period of which so very few specimens exist; bold and vigorous, yet careful: in fact, a marvellous master-piece; or I shouldn't have brought it here."

"Benjamin reminds me of a cheap John at a fair, selling a knife which is the biggest, and the best, and the cheapest ever made. Ever been in the trade, Ben? believe me it's even better than picture-dealing."

Mr. Wills was famous for a comic song: no one ever knew him but they knew the song; and he

began to troll out a part of it, at the master's allusion, in a loud, bawling voice.

Mr. Hall elevated his eyebrows, and twirled his gold pencil-case; he was not fond of Mr. Wills. The master fairly rolled in his arm-chair, laughing.

"Stop, stop, Benjamin! damn your comic song; why don't you try the sentimental. Did you ever hear Mr. Wills' love ditty, Jim?"

Mr. Hall, thus appealed to, had not had that honour.

"Ah! you've lost a treat, then; if you'll go to the bottom of the garden, he shall begin. I can't allow you any nearer."

"Now then, master, now then; chaffing Benny again. Go on, go on; only come and see my Müller, and you appease my feelings."

"Where is the picture you speak of, Mr. Wills? Is it in Manchester?" asked Mr. Hall, feeling it incumbent on him to say something.

"Yes, at my rooms, sir. On view every day from ten in the morning till dusk: at the Exchange, sir—the Royal Exchange. Shall be most delighted to see you, if you'll have the goodness to name the day. Begad! haven't a card about me, but the master knows the way, and my slavey is always in attendance."

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“You should tell Jim how high it is up—fifty steps; I counted 'em the last time I went up,” said the master. “Well, I’ll come, I dare say, some day; and now, Mr. Wills, let’s hear the London gossip.”

## CHAPTER VI.

## THE STUDIO.

BEFORE the front windows of Madapollam House was a broad, smooth lawn, at the bottom of which you descended by a few steps into a large and elaborately cultivated garden of flowers, from whence, branching to the left, and where a group of noble trees hid you from the house, you came upon the pool.

The walk between the trees and the water was a favourite resort of Mr. Francis Miles, and while his father was receiving his guests in the gallery, and his sisters pursued their occupations in the drawing-room, he was wandering there in the moonlight, smoking his pipe.

He was by far the most independent member of that household, going and coming as he pleased, interfering with no one's arrangements, and no one interfering with his. He had an out-building adjoining the house, which he had furnished after his own notions of comfort, and which he had converted into

laboratory, studio, library, and smoke-room, rolled in one. He crowded into it canvases, easels, lay figures, patent stoves, chemicals, books, unframed pictures, sketches, folios, fishing-rods, boxing-gloves, unlimited pipes of every size and shape imaginable, and, in fact, everything that had caught his vagrant fancy at one time or another. He was no companion to his father: secretly, perhaps, old Candy was half afraid of the lad he had been proud of educating so well and bringing up so luxuriously, and preferred the society of those who, in consideration of his wealth and experience, overlooked his grammatical errors and eccentricities; yet there was a great deal of quiet, unobtrusive liking and respect existing between father and son.

"My father is a better man than I shall ever be," Frank would say, thinking admiringly of the days of struggle and poverty gone past, and acknowledging he should never have won the race. "It is time we went in, old chum," he said, addressing his pipe and getting out of the shade cast by the tall trees into the moonlight, and then back again, "or Margaret will think me uncivil. Ah! happy pipe! thou hast no one to please but thyself and me; while I am forced by the rules of society to consider somebody else. And yet I like Margaret: she is

handsome, she is good-tempered, and I—yes, I love her. Why, three months ago I was feeling all sorts of jealous pains about her because that infernal little prig Augustus Charlton thought proper to pay her his confounded attentions; but the excitement has died away like it does from everything I gain possession of, and we feel, old pipe, as if we could go on as we are doing now for ever without desiring any nearer tie. But the fault lies with ourselves, dear pipe; we are too cold-blooded, too reliant perhaps—are too fond of the idle, objectless life we lead.”

If we generally talk to convince others, we sometimes do the same to convince ourselves; put aside our own arguments, dispute our own beliefs: it may be requisite that we should think exactly opposite to what we do now, so we set to clearing away the obstacles with good-will.

If Mr. Frank's feelings towards the lady he spoke of had undergone a change, he would not acknowledge it to himself: he would not define the cause of that change; but he set himself to work to convince himself there was no such change at all. If the union which he had formerly looked forward to with pleasure, had now assumed a repugnant aspect, why, the change was—was owing to the weather, let us say.

He left the pool, and wound his way thoughtfully to his laboratory, and turning the key, let himself in, and lit his lamp: then, taking an easel with a canvas on it from the corner, he brought it where the light would fall upon it, and saw stretched thereon the reason he would not define to himself. It was a female head, slightly but vigorously laid on; perhaps the artist had *felt* the subject.

"I never did a better face," he said, turning his thoughts with rigorous determination to the execution, rather than to the portrait.

It was Mary Rueby as he had seen her at the cottage door, and been struck with her beauty. Coming home and painting it, he had been astonished at the fidelity of his memory for each little detail, and more astonished at the pleasure he felt in working on it. Why should that face have a charm for him? He must have seen more handsome ones than a poor country girl could boast; yet none had ever touched him so, and, looking at it then with his late thoughts strong upon him, it unnerved him, and he turned away.

"She is in the house now," he said; "when I go in, I shall most likely see her. It was at my wish she came, and yet I would to God, for her own good and mine, she had kept away.

"One resolution I make, that, at any rate, I must never break, never swerve from: she shall never know I thought of her; to me she is my sister's servant, nothing more. For myself—why, I must take myself in hand, and effect a cure as I best can.—A cure!" he repeated, impatiently, "I'm not ill; I don't care for the girl; I don't know her; for all I know she is coarse of mind, and vulgar of speech: I only know her face, and have learnt to love my own impersonation of it. So here goes for the first bolus, the same to be taken nightly till the cure be effected."

He took up his palette and brush, and working up a daub of dark paint, set himself to work to spoil the face; not to efface it—he knew he should remember it then, in all its unsullied loveliness—but to add hideous deformities to it, and caricature it, and laugh at it. But he was making fun of his tenderest feelings, and he could not carry out his intention of leaving it on the easel the deformity he had made it, and mercifully effaced the whole.

"The bolus is too sickening to be taken whole," he said, carrying out his simile; "but we have set ourselves to the task, and will effect it by continued draughts; and the first shall be in the shape of Margaret. So now for her."

But he had to take another turn or two up and down his room before he went, to get himself into a better frame of mind, he said; and then, having returned his easel to its corner, he put out the lamp, and got out into the moonlight again.

When he had nearly reached the house, or rather that portion of it that he chose to enter by, and was trying to assume the slouching, indifferent appearance he generally affected when he had been thinking of nothing particular, he discovered he had left the principal feature in the make-up—his pipe—behind him, and wondered how anything could have made him forgetful of *that* as he returned for it.

Coming back to the house, he avoided the back way, faithful to his resolution, lest he should meet Mary, and went round to the front door.

“Any one with my father?” he asked of Rascals, who opened it.

“Mr. Hall and Mr. Wills, sir.”

Frank crossed the hall to the drawing-room. It was a large, well-lighted room, with the handsomest of mirrors, and tables, and couches, the softest of carpets, the most luxuriant of mats. Drawings hung on the walls, and books lay scattered about.

Everything betrayed unlimited capital and lavish expenditure, from the magnificent pianoforte to the glittering chandelier.

The two Misses Miles were bending over embroidery frames; tall, well-dressed, and slightly haughty in appearance, they accorded well with the splendour about them.

Miss Margaret Hall occupied a large chair by the fire, and was reading; she looked up when Frank came in, and greeted him with a smile.

"Tired of the moonlight already, Mr. Frank?" she said, gaily, but with a slight intimation of pique in her tone. "Have you made the acquaintance of the water-sprites, that you are so constantly at that dark pool?"

"You should have come out too, Miss Hall; you have no idea how much preferable the soft is to all this glare."

"I only wonder, under the circumstances, that you came in at all," Margaret said, with a shrug, as he drew up his chair.

"Oh, Frank!" broke in Miss Eliza Miles, "have you seen our new servant?"

"I caught a glimpse of her as I went out yesterday."

"Is she not handsome?"

"I really did not notice her very particularly."

Frank drew nearer the fire, and farther from the gaslight.

"It is quite cold to-night," he remarked.

"Do you think so?" said Margaret. "But I wonder, Mr. Francis, with your eye for beauty, that you did not notice Mary more closely: I thought I had never seen a more lovely face."

"Frank is playing the fox," said Miss Miles; "he knew the family before they came to Manchester."

Miss Miles cherished a long series of injuries, real or imaginary, against her brother, and rarely lost an opportunity of disconcerting him. She had no reason to suppose she did so in the present case, but still there was a chance.

"I knew the father, Sarah, but not the rest of the family. I saw him at S——, and he lived ten miles off," Frank said.

"Is there another daughter?" asked Margaret; it seemed as though she were resolved to pursue the subject.

"Yes, an older one; she is a spinner at our factory."

"Poor girl! how she will miss the fresh air, and her liberty, to come to this smoke and dirt!"

"The smoke and dirt are not the worst parts of

factory life and experience, Margaret," Frank said, with a kindly feeling towards her for that pity. "You ladies who go down in your carriages, and pass along Market Street and St. Ann's Square, and do your shopping, and come home again,—what do you know of factory life and factories? The policeman keeps the beggars out of your way; the deformed, the crippled, and the miserable, hide themselves of their own accord, ashamed of their wretchedness. You don't seek them out, you don't see them, and you don't think of them; if poverty doesn't come begging for charity, you never dream how much misery exists within a yard or two of you."

## CHAPTER VII.

### DOMESTIC.

MR. HALL lived at Prestwich, a little village some five or six miles outside Manchester. His house was a squarely built one of red brick, of most substantial and capacious appearance, which, turning its back upon the road, looked down a smooth, fertile valley, with a broad stream at the bottom.

The grounds round were extensive and well wooded, and presented every now and then, stray patches of culture apparent among the luxuriant wildness: a bed of rare and beautiful flowers, a walk beneath trees twining themselves overhead, a picturesque arbour, all presenting themselves unexpectedly, and leaving a doubt as to whether nature or art had placed them there. This was Mr. Hall's idea of the beauty of still life. Mrs. Hall had her conservatory, her beds of standard-roses, her flower-pots of camellias; but none of these pleased him: he was fond of contrasts; where the fern grew most luxuriantly, and the leaf shade above the most complete, he wanted brightly-tinted

flowers, rich in dye and rare; and drove the gardener to his wit's end by choosing the spot where they would not grow.

It was a bright summer's morning, and Mr. Hall was in the breakfast-room, waiting till Margaret should come down and give him his breakfast; his wife always took her's upstairs, and her younger daughter with her.

He was standing at the window looking out upon the valley below, where the sunlight was playing on the water, and a faint breeze rustled among the trees growing upon the margin, stirring the green foliage. The birds were singing cheerily in the trees near the house, and Mr. Hall pushed open the folding windows. The servant brought in the urn, saying Miss Hall would be in directly, and Margaret, making her appearance a few seconds afterwards, received her usual embrace, and took her place at the breakfast table.

Sitting there, perhaps, I had better describe her. In stature she was rather tall and well shaped. Her face was good in shape, and usually pale, with a liability to flush deeply when Mistress Margaret was excited or provoked. She had large brown eyes, full of all sorts of meaning for different moods and different people; generally they were

bright and sarcastic—only her father, and occasionally Frank Miles, knew them soft and tender. Margaret was by no means amiable with everybody, and often pitilessly cruel and severe when anything excited her ridicule or indignation. Over the eyes came long dark lashes, and above, making the outline for her broad white forehead, lay some straight, ponderous eyebrows, that had an objection to arch more than they could help, and insisted on obtruding themselves on the notice of any one who observed the face at all. Her nose was straight, prominent, and well-shapen ; her lips deep in colour, and perhaps a little expressive of pride ; add to these, thick brown hair, that she was fond of wearing in silky massive curls, a throat exquisitely white and soft, and broad handsome shoulders, and I have introduced to your polite notice Miss Margaret Hall.

“ Papa,” said this personage, during breakfast, “ have you seen Mr. Pilliger’s donation towards the new schoolrooms ? ”

“ No, my dear, is it handsome ? ”

“ He heads the list with fifty guineas ; of course, every one is struck with his munificence. I think it is mere ostentation ; I dare say he expects to get something by it.”

Mr. Hall looked up from his paper.

"My dear Maggie, what right have you to suppose he does not bestow it out of good feeling, and a wish to forward the interests of the village?"

"Much he cares whether Sally Brown and Tibby Tatler can read or write," said Margaret.

"I don't pretend that he can have any individual interest in the two distinguished persons just named, but, as a gentleman of education himself, he doubtless wishes to see cultivation more generally diffused. A little more sugar, if you please. Don't you like our neighbour, Maggie?"

"No, not particularly."

"I am sorry for that; I want to go down and see him this morning before he goes to town, and I thought we would walk together."

"So we will," Margaret said, heartily; "it would take more than a slight distaste for Mr. Pilliger, to make me give up our morning's walk."

After breakfast, while Margaret put on her bonnet, Mr. Hall went up to see his wife. That lady was taking her tea in her dressing-room, attired in the most elegant of morning robes. At her feet, sat a slightly made, pretty girl, twisting some artificial roses in her long ringlets.

"I am going down to Mr. Pilliger's, my dear. Have you any message?"

Mrs. Hall may have been some seven or eight years younger than her husband: she had large black eyes and delicately chiselled features; time back she must have been very pretty, when that look of peevish irritability had not worn itself so deeply upon her face.

"No, I have no message; I might have had, but now I should be ashamed," the lady said.

"And why?"

"Why? Really, Mr. Hall, how can you ask? here we are nearly the oldest family in the village, and an upstart Lawyer comes forward, and puts us into the background altogether."

"I do not think our position was ever very notable in this same little village, but still less do I see how Mr. Pilliger has dislodged us. Come here, Juliet."

The child glanced at Mrs. Hall, and then went up timidly to her father.

"Thank you, papa, for the beautiful book you bought me yesterday," she said, prettily, as she stood at his knee.

"Have you begun to read it yet, Juliet?" said Mr. Hall, playing with her hair.

"No, papa. Mamma put it away."

Mr. Hall looked up angrily at his wife.

"Do you object to the child reading it, Fanny? I think I am sufficient judge as to what she should read or not."

"Oh, yes, and if I leave it to you, you'll make her as bad as Margaret. Ah, when I saw that same book—I think it was the same; at least it had the same binding—how little I thought when I first saw it in Margaret's hands, what it would come to!"

"Well, what has it led to?" asked Mr. Hall, a little impatiently.

"Why, the alienation of my child's affections; here Margaret cares no more about me than she does a about a flowerpot, and it's all through your books, I know," and here the aggrieved lady drew forth a delicately scented handkerchief. Her husband left his seat a little impatiently; perhaps the grievance was not a new one, and we are apt to be intolerant of old unreformed ones.

"And now I suppose she is going with you to the Pilligers?"

"Yes, she is."

"And you are walking, instead of ordering out your carriage, and going down with your daughter, as a gentleman should."

"Pshaw, my dear! it is only a morning call on

business. Have the carriage out, if you wish, and go and call on Mrs. Pilliger yourself."

"No, I shall never care to go again; she will be sure to insult me about their church donation the very first time we meet——"

Mr. Hall interrupted her by striding across the room impatiently.

"Look here, my dear—if our neighbour can afford to give fifty pounds to the village school, it is more than I can; at any rate, I have not done so, and shall not; so let me hear no more about it. If they find themselves short of a pound or two at the end, they shall have it, and welcome; but I won't give a penny more than my name is down for now."

Mrs. Hall had recourse to her handkerchief, and Mr. Hall quitted the room, and spent the rest of his time of waiting at the breakfast-room window.

He had married while his wife was young; had married her out of a ball-room, where her lively manners, her bright eyes, and long ringlets gave her a prominent position; she boasted better birth than he, but she was poor, and a rich man, even though the son of a commoner, was a good *coup*.

Perhaps, when he took her home he found there was something else wanting to make home happy beside liveliness, bright eyes, and ringlets. A

grave, studious man himself, he may have found how liveliness becomes mere frivolity if there is no depth of feeling underneath, and its time of pleasing very transient; may have seen how little she could be his companion, how little understand him and his pursuits. This, forcing itself upon him very soon after his marriage, may have made him look gloomily into the future; but he was a gentleman at heart: he said all this was his fault, and that she should never know how short a time the illusion had lasted. All those years following he was very kind to her, and bore her small mean allusions to her superiority of blood very forbearingly, and her complaints at their quiet life quite patiently: if in spirit he lived away from her, if he sickened sometimes at her pettishness and her weak upbraidings, he seldom showed it. He got his reward in the daughter that was born to him a year after their marriage. Very early he traced in her a resemblance to his own mother, whom he had loved tenderly, and, not generally fond of children, found himself drawn to her. I know no love more thoroughly unselfish and pure than that which may exist between father and daughter, whose sympathies tend to one point, and whose confidence in each other is entire.

As a child he had noticed her, and frequently directed her studies ; but as she grew up, when she could know and appreciate him as her mother had never done, and never tried to do, the two natures found so much in common between them, that from the time she was fourteen they were seldom apart. They read together ; travelled together ; passed reverentially through Roman palaces and Roman ruins ; passed long, happy days in picture galleries at home and abroad, full of admiration and love for the genius around them ; lingered amid beautiful scenery, —perfect epicures in their appreciation of what was beautiful ; made long pilgrimages to celebrated graves ; and each feeling these pleasures were dependent on each other's society. It scarcely mattered whether they viewed a rustic waterfall near home, or a triumph of Grecian architecture afar off,—they were together and enjoyed it. With Margaret this love was part of her life, had grown up with her, and no after love could supplant it. She had met Francis Miles, had grown to like his society, and he hers, and they had been engaged to each other with their own most perfect wish and consent. He loved her, and she loved him ; but she clung to her father none the less for all that. Perhaps their love had been too easy ; they had never had any

crosses; there were no obstructions in their path, no wide ditches of prejudice to overcome, no thick wall of family objections to break through, or scale, no sacrifice to be made. They plighted their faith amid wealth and ease; there was the same wealth always in the future for them, always carriages, and cushions, and fine houses. Margaret would have a large dower, and Frank was his father's heir. Mr. Candy Miles smiled approbation, and the sun was always to shine for them, as it was shining then. Was it not a pleasant, easy way of doing things, and a total overthrow of that old adage concerning true love? They met with pleasure, but they parted without much pain; they could always see each other when they wished, so had no particular anxiety about it. Frank was a good boy, and, indeed, did not care for much female society besides her own, and Margaret was no flirt; she was too frank, too honest, too absorbed in the many studies to which her father had introduced her, and, let me say, too true and good, for that, the meanest of all diversions.

But, summing up all this, we come still upon Margaret's paternal love, and find that, whatever plans she might have had for the future, her father occupied a very prominent position in the picture.

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And here she comes touching him lightly on the shoulder, reminding him how bright the sunshine is, and he, startled from his reverie, turns to kiss her, thinking how much she is to him, how necessary, and how dear.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## THE LAWYER'S SANCTUM.

MR. FREDERICK ALFRED PILLIGER was a neighbour of Mr. Hall's. He lived on the other side of the old church, in a neat compact little house standing in its own grounds. This same house was perfect in its way, exquisitely furnished, with everything that could be moderately desired, nothing loud or obtrusive to shock the most sensitive eye, complete in its arrangements, and presided over by a lady of considerable beauty, and still more considerable taste and manners.

Mr. Pilliger was a lawyer; tall, well-formed, with light sandy hair thrown back from a clever, handsome face, a gentleman in manners, an authority in art and wine, always scrupulously well-dressed, and about forty years of age, but looking younger, there was very little with which to associate red tape and thievery about him. He had been living there about two years, and in that time had taken the precedence

of most of the houses scattered about. Their mode of living was most edifying. Mr. Pilliger went every morning to business in a dogcart; Mrs. Pilliger had her morning calls, her charities to attend to, and might have been seen hunting about, in the most charming of morning costumes, after poor men's cottages and poor men's wives. One must have something to do, and if there is nobody to talk scandal with, or discuss the last opera, why, let us be good, and distribute tracts and water-gruel. On a Sunday, the neat handsome brougham came out, and they went to church: there was no more regular church-goer in the village than Mr. Pilliger, and his deep rich voice echoed the responses in a way that went to everybody's heart. In the midst of his success in life, in the midst of wealth and pleasure, he never forgot to bow his tall head, once every week, over his prayer-book, never forgot to ask the old clergyman to dinner, and raise his hat to that gentleman's daughter.

Bellmore House was hidden from the road by a row of tall poplar-trees. Entering at the gate, and leaving those trees behind, the house burst upon you amidst the most luxuriant of creepers, and the most brilliant of flowers. No art had been spared to make that first view as perfect as might be.

There was a small lawn in front, smooth as Genoa velvet, and looking, with its borders of geranium and verbena, like some skilfully manufactured carpet, whose hues had been borrowed from Tyre.

The windows of the breakfast room opened upon the lawn, and Mrs. Pilliger sat therein writing. She was a tall, handsome woman, with suave, graceful manners.

"Mr. and Miss Hall," announced the footman.

The lady rose gracefully: she greeted Mr. Hall with cordial warmth; to Margaret she was tenderly affectionate. Mr. Pilliger was in the garden, she would call him, and she stepped lightly to the window for that purpose.

"Thank you, I will go to him," Mr. Hall said.

"Shall we go too, Margaret, unless you are tired?" asked Mrs. Pilliger. "It seems wrong to spend so bright a morning in the house."

Margaret assented: to all these winning graces, these cordial smiles, these graceful manners, that ill-conditioned young woman had only a brief reply to make. She was not fond of Mrs. Pilliger. Seeing few people makes us keen in the appreciation of character; we sift the single individual brought to our notice with marvellous acuteness, find falsehood in the smiles, wrinkles in the cheeks, vermilion

on the lips. The fashionable jargon seems affectation, the attitudes appear studied; we judge them harshly and smile at their foibles grimly. We do many things we have no right to do: maybe they are false, but are we true? Are not straightforward speaking, bluff cordiality, and heartiness, sometimes only a thicker cloak for what we would hide, only another method of throwing dust into our neighbours' eyes? When Margaret shrank from the arm thrown round her, I do not pretend to excuse her rudeness, or think her right; we have each our standard of virtue and goodness, and Margaret, having studied her graceful neighbour after her own fashion, had found her wanting.

A little beyond the row of laurels that bordered one side of the garden was a hayfield, and the makers were at work in the sunshine.

"We are quite rural here," Mrs. Pilliger said: "flowers, and butterflies, and new-mown hay. Is it not sufficient to induce one to take up a rake and turn into the field oneself?"

"Haymaking is one of those occupations," began Mr. Hall, gravely, and as if he had been studying the question for the last five minutes, "which sounds perfect in theory and is most objectionable in practice: the sunshine, and the perfume, and the

freshly cut grass are all very pleasant when you can leave them at any moment for a cool library; but to endure all day the unsheltered heat, to work when all nature seems to invite repose, appears to me, so far from a pleasure, a positive hardship."

"Ah, you are practical; I scarcely expected so well considered a reply," said Mrs. Pilliger. "There is Alfred!"

That gentleman was discovered, pacing to and fro in a sheltered walk, and as they approached, he, still unconscious of their vicinity, paused, looking down the glade, and stroking his long light whiskers with a peculiar smile on his face—a cynical smile, a smile of evil boding for whomsoever he might have been thinking of—a wicked, revengeful, cruel distortion of his lips, I would say, were he not so good a man, so regular an attendant at church, so liberal a donor of village schools.

"Alfred!" said his wife's musical voice, as they stood within a few steps of him.

Constitutionally nervous, he turned with a start, and taking in matters, threw a quick, meaning glance at his wife. She should have known Mr. Pilliger hated being startled, being lit upon unexpectedly.

"Charming day," said Mr. Pilliger, after a warm

greeting. "I was just taking in this view: we stand so high, the stretch of country we get is astonishing."

"You have the advantage of us there; except from the window overlooking the mere, we have positively no view," said Mr. Hall.

"Ah, but you have such noble trees," said Mrs. Pilliger. "I love fir-trees."

"You should see ours now, then, Mrs. Pilliger; they are very fine: I am quite proud of them," Mr. Hall said. "Will you come up to-day? You have not favoured us with a call lately."

The two gentlemen strode on first; Margaret would have followed, but Mrs. Pilliger interposed. Effectually, but very gently, she prevented Margaret's intention of being at her father's side during his conferences with Mr. Pilliger, and with that gentle hand upon her shoulder detained her to— to point out the delicate tint of the interior of a tulip!

"You are not fond of tulips, Miss Hall?"

"Not very."

"The gentlemen have turned into the study to talk business, I suppose. Polite, is it not? You will come in and lunch with me, Margaret; they may be some time."

There was no help for it: Margaret was no match for Mrs. Pilliger; the gentlemen had disappeared from view, and Mrs. Pilliger was making a bouquet with the most unconscious grace possible.


## CHAPTER IX.

### IN HIS ELEMENT.

MR. GRIMMITT was an overlooker at Mr. Candy Miles's mill. He and Gilbert Farrel divided the hands between them, and managed them each in his own way; Gilbert by encouragement and example, Grimmitt by threats and blows. He was essentially an ill-conditioned man, short and slight in person, with a cruel, crafty face, into which a "hand" had never looked and found there a kind expression; he deemed every man his enemy and mistrusted him.

One bright starry night he set out from the factory on an errand that pleased him. A female "hand" had stayed away for the last two days, and he was going to tell her she need not come any more at all. He had fiendish enjoyment of human misery, and in the present instance, while he was protecting his master's interests, he was paying a small grudge of his own at the same time.

"Susan Barrett was too good for me, was she?"



We'll see how she looks now; shouldn't wonder if 't would be quite a different thing. Guess she's found this last month rather hardish," he said, with a chuckle.

The prospect was so delightful and so invigorating to Mr. Grimmitt, that he quickened his pace out of mere overflow of animal spirits, and, considering the general uncertain state of his legs, got over the ground in a marvellous manner.

The house he was going to was in Mile End Street, one of the most squalid streets about. It had no pavement, and the pathway was only indicated by a line of little heaps of dirt about a yard in front of each door, and so regular as to be only absent where the house was untenanted. Over these Mr. Grimmitt went stumbling and cursing, till he arrived, out of breath with the two exertions, at the house he wanted.

Having knocked, and got no answer, he turned the handle of the door, and put in his head. The room was so dimly lit by a long thin candle on the high mantelshelf, that at first he could hardly distinguish who was there. Beneath the window, on a narrow low bed, lay a thin, sickly girl, flushed with fever, and throwing her arm restlessly about her; by her sat Esther Rueby. There was no

one else in the room, and scarcely any furniture. The opening of the door excited the sick girl's delirious fancy.

"What's th' time? ain't it nigh time I were there? I shall be late agin; gi' me my breakfast, an' I'll be off," she cried; then, as she started up, catching sight of Grimmitt as he came in, some past grievance came strongly upon her: "Esther, Esther, keep him away; thou does na' ken him as I do; I'm tired o' my life, an' it's nobbut nor work — work fra mornin' to night, an' then a beatin'."

Grimmitt fell back into the shadow, with an angry scowl on his face, and Esther soothed the excited girl.

"Is Mrs. Barrett at home?" he said.

"Yes, I'll call her," replied Esther, leaving the bedside, and then hesitating to quit the room.

"What brings thee here, Esther?" asked Mr. Grimmitt, turning his attention to her.

"I looked in to see how Susan was to-night, sir, and Mrs. Barrett asked me to stop with her, while she made her husband comfortable."

"Ah, thee art very kind to the poor people," said Grimmitt, with a leer; "thee seems so gentle with 'em, I should almost like to fall sick myself, Esther, if thee'd come and nurse me."

Esther regarded him with the most profound astonishment, and then went to the bottom of the stairs to call Mrs. Barrett. Though she knew but little against him, perhaps Mr. Grimmitt was hardly fitted for very sudden female conquest.

Mrs. Barrett came down, treading heavily and wearily; she had her husband and Susan down with the sickness together, and the care of them lay heavily on her, single-handed; nor did the sight of Mr. Grimmitt standing on her hearthstone tend to raise her spirits. Like a bird of ill omen, that gentleman's presence among the "hands" always foreboded misfortune.

"Good evening, Mrs. Barrett. Missed you at the factory these last two days; it won't do, you know, this irregularity. I can't have it."

"What mun I do, sir?" said the woman. "I cam' as long as I could, an' left Susan wi' my poor man, till she ha' took it, an' they be both down wi' 't."

"Still, Mrs. Barrett, I can't allow it. Why, if I did, I should never know when I should have half of you or not."

"But what could I do, sir? Don't be hard on me. I've worked hard an' faithful for this last two year at th' mill," said the woman, breaking into

tears; "an' thee knows I've never stopped away but when I war forced, an' I can't leave them two raving mortals together, to tear out body an' soul. On'y just let on to th' master how 't war, an' I'm sure he'll na' turn me adrift."

Mrs. Barrett got nothing by this last argument. Mr. Grimmitt hated being reminded he, too, had a master, and he told her shortly she was not to come again to the factory.

The poor woman threw her apron over her head.

"God help us!" she cried. "Tom has na' been t' work sin' two week, and Sue can't go, an' now I be turned off. Where we shall get bread I don't know; th' furniture's most a' gone, an' we'll be turned out in t' streets wi' nobbut a bed to lie on."

There is, perhaps, no position more painful than to stand by and see pain carelessly inflicted, but which we have no power to alleviate. Esther could scarcely restrain her indignation against the little brute serenely whistling on the hearthstone, yet felt her interference would effect nothing.

The girl on the bed recommenced her raving; unconsciously she was retailing all her factory life. Now she heard the policeman's rattle against the window in the morning; she must get up, she would be late; now it was time to leave; the others were

going; but Mr. Grimmitt had bid her stop and clean her machine, and she was so tired, and her head was so heavy; and—— A knock at the door silenced her, and she laid her head on Esther's shoulder.

Mrs. Barrett opened the door, and in walked Gilbert Farrel. He bestowed on Mr. Grimmitt a look of comical surprise, as though he said, "Wonder what *you* are doing here?" and gave Mrs. Barrett and Esther his usual kindly nod.

"How's the master? Any better to-night?" said Gilbert

"Not o'er much better, sir, I'm thinkin'; he's terrible sick."

"I'm sorry to hear it. You must take good care of him, missus. I came down to tell you not to hurry back to work this week or two. Stop and nurse him, and then start all fair again."

The poor woman's face flushed with pleasure.

"Oh! Mr. Farrel——" she began.

Gilbert caught sight of Esther's face as she turned it upon him.

"Well, what is it?" he said, puzzled.

"We have just had a different message, sir," she said.

"God bless you, sir!" broke out Mrs. Barrett,

with a strong inclination to go down on her knees.

“What is this, Grimmitt?”

“What brings you meddling among my people? I gave Mrs. Barrett notice, and if you can’t show any authority besides your own, I stick to it.”

Gilbert’s opinion of Mr. Grimmitt was much the same as a boy might have of a stinging insect, that he could crush at any moment, yet spared, to watch its little moves.

“Give a woman notice for stopping at home to mind her husband! Damn it, Grimmitt, what would you have her do?”

“Let her do as she can. I won’t have this irregularity among the hands; if they stop away one week for their own pleasure, they shall stop away the rest of the year for mine.”

There was something refreshing in the laugh with which Gilbert greeted this logic; it seemed to clear the air of all the blackness and discontent which Mr. Grimmitt’s presence seldom failed to create.

“Well, at any rate, the master has a different way of doing things, and he told me to come down to-night to Mrs. Barrett’s: he heard her husband was ill this morning when he went round.”

This being the case, Mr. Grimmitt had nothing more to say, but only growled out something derogatory both to Gilbert and his master. Gilbert caught it.

"Not a word against Mr. Miles, Grimmitt, or I'll knock you down."

"I suppose so," sneered Grimmitt. "Well, good-night. Good-night, Esther; don't forget your promise to come and nurse me."

Esther blushed, for Gilbert had turned round to look at her in surprise.

"You know where I live," pursued Mr. Grimmitt, with a fascinating leer.

Esther turned away, more than ever conscious of Gilbert's surprise.

"Well, good-night, my dear; don't forget, that's all." He lingered a moment, enjoying the girl's confusion, and then departed, conscious that he had half repaid his recent defeat.

Susan had fallen asleep, and Esther put on her bonnet to go, Mrs. Barrett detaining her a moment, thanking her, and bidding her take no heed of Mr. Grimmitt; he always looked after a new hand, she said.

Gilbert stood watching them; those last words of Grimmitt's had made him grave, and when Esther

went he bade Mrs. Barrett good-night, and followed her out.

“Mr. Grimmitt is a nice man, don’t you think? has a nice pleasant manner with him?” said Gilbert, as he walked by her, and stumbled over the heaps of dirt; or he might have been kicking them, in place of Mr. Grimmitt.

“I don’t know much about him, sir, but he didn’t show his pleasantry much to-night, I think?”

“Why not?”

“In making Mrs. Barrett so unhappy, and——” and insulting me, she was about to say, but stopped.

“Ah, that is only his way, I dare say.”

## CHAPTER X.

## A VERY NECESSARY CAUTION.

MARY had been to see her parents, and, although it was after nine o'clock, was returning alone to Madapollam House. It had been much against Esther's liking to let her go alone, but Bob was tired with his day's work, and Mrs. Rueby would not spare Esther, so she set out with a strict injunction to walk quickly and not stop for anything.

She had passed the town and got upon the broad, pleasant road that had only fine houses on either side, and where vehicles were more frequent than foot passengers (another token of the aristocracy of the neighbourhood), when a gentleman, who had been walking slowly on the opposite side, smoking, crossed over to her.

She did not recognize him at first, and, mindful of her injunctions, quickened her pace.

"Stop, Mary; don't you know me?" said Mr. Francis.

Mary stopped, blushing; she knew it was wrong, but she could not help remembering she had seen him before she was in his father's house.

"Don't walk so fast; it is a lovely night, and you are not due till ten."

Mary slackened her pace and he walked on beside her, smoking vigorously; he was trying to determine in his own mind why he had stopped the girl, and found he had no purpose, but had only obeyed a natural impulse on seeing her.

"You have been to see your mother, I suppose."

"Yes, sir."

"Did you find them all well at home?"

"Yes, sir, thank you."

Frank felt this was not a good style of conversation and rushed at once to something else.

"How do you like living at my father's, Mary? are they civil to you?"

"I like it very much, sir, but ——"

"But what? Come, Mary, tell me your grievance; we are old friends, you remember."

"I hardly know, sir: they are very kind to me, but it seems a little strange to be in service at all, at first," said Mary, hesitating.

"You would sooner go to the factory with your sister, then?"

"Oh, no, sir; you must not take what I said in earnest; it is only a little strange just at first. I should not like to go away—to leave Mr. Miles's at all."

Mr. Francis felt himself interested in the eager tone in which this was said.

"You mean, then, that you would rather not have come to Manchester at all; you are angry with me for having brought you here."

"You brought me here, Mr. Francis?" repeated Mary.

"Yes; did you not know it? Do you remember I met you once? and when I heard your father was coming here, I said you must come to the house. You are too handsome for the factory, Mary."

Mr. Francis was himself ever so many years older when he said this; quite an elderly gentleman, indeed, and an entirely disinterested protector of beauty and innocence.

"And you must take care, even now, and not get any sweethearts; the country is very different from the town."

Mary laughed, such a musical, coquettish laugh. Ah! Monsieur le Mentor, take care! *you* are not deaf, and the Sirens' Island is not passed yet.

"So you think I am talking to you as though you

were a child," Frank said ; " why, I dare say you've left a sweetheart behind you, eh ? Tell me all about him, Mary."

Mary protested she had left nothing of the kind, and Frank changed his ground again, remembering his resolution, and determined she should not have a suspicion that the state of her affections was a matter of any interest to him.

" Indeed it is not," he said, silently, to keep peace with his conscience.

" You have an elder sister, Mary ; tell me about her ; I saw her at the factory this morning."

" Did you, sir ? oh, I wish you could know Esther, you would like her so."

Mr. Francis was charmed with her enthusiasm.

" I see nothing like this in society," thought he.

" And why should I like her so much, Mary ? I am not generally fond of female society."

" Arn't you, sir ? But you could not help liking Esther : every one liked her who knew her at home, and even now at the factory she's a great favourite. I dare say before long one of the overseers will be wanting to marry her, and then she'll be a lady as she deserves."

Frank laughed, wondering whether it was Mr. Grimmitt, or his friend Gilbert, for whom this human

prodigy, in whom he had only discovered a very quiet, demure young woman, was destined.

"Is she very handsome then?" he said.

"No, sir, not very handsome; but being so patient and good, no one never notices whether she's handsome or not."

"You seem very fond of her."

"I couldn't help it, sir; why, she's as careful of me as though I were a little child."

"And I suppose she gave you the same caution as I did," Frank said, abruptly, and as though his conscience had suddenly pulled him up short. "Well, mind you observe it. There is my father's gate, and it is quite time you went in, Mary. Good-night! I am not coming in yet," and he turned shortly down an opposite road, leaving poor Mary aghast at the sudden change.

"I could not have said anything to displease him, that he need go away in that manner," she said, with the foolish tears in her eyes, as she went in.

## CHAPTER XI.

### MR. WILLS' "LITTLE GAME."

ACCORDING to promise, one fine morning found Mr. Candy Miles toiling up the Exchange steps to Mr. Wills' rooms. Before he reached them, Mr. Wills issued out upon the landing to cheer him up the weary toil.

"Now then, master, glad to see you. Benjamin Wills is a proud man, sir, when he sees Mr. Candy Miles mounting his steps—a proud man, sir. Stayed in on purpose: lots of calls to make; neglect my best friends; see them pine, or go to the devil, but my friend Candy Miles is coming to see me; the call is imperative, and Benjamin is never deaf to the call of duty, sir. Ha, ha!"

"I wish Benjamin would learn how to keep his mouth shut," growled the master, who hated being received, hated fuss, hated having his name called out as it was being now, till the gentleman on the ground-floor could hear it.

So thorough was Mr. Wills' want of tact, that the Müller lost at least a fifth of its value in the master's eyes, through that very reception.

That work of art, when he did see it, was in a small room partitioned off, and hung with draperies that fell in festoons round the picture; it was evidently "got up" for the occasion. Mr. Wills believed firmly in getting up a thing. He always said, "Give me ever so old a work; say it has been the round for the last twenty years, passing from hand to hand as a makeweight; let it be worth my while, and you shan't know it again: a new frame, a robbery box with crimson velvet, plenty of drapery, and no other picture in view; call it a gem, and appear to believe it so, and begad, sir, I should like to see the man who would say no!"

He was in his glory, showing this picture to the cotton-spinner; that gentleman listening with the utmost gravity to all he said. Once or twice Mr. Wills threw an anxious glance at the astute face before him, apparently studying the picture, and felt a twinge at what he was saying. Did Mr. Miles believe him? Was he laughing at him to himself, or was he going to write a cheque for the amount?

While he was wondering, a message came up; a gentleman wished to see Mr. Wills for five minutes.

Mr. Wills was engaged; but Mr. Candy Miles, throwing down his stick and hat, as an intimation he would wait, bade him go.

Left alone, the master walked up and down the room with his hands behind him cogitating, and, as a natural consequence, whistling, when there popped in from a side door, a short, sallow-faced little man of foreign appearance. Among a multitude of bows, M. Zacque made a thousand apologies, but did he speak with M. Miles, the gentleman so celebrate.

"The gentleman so celebrate" eyed him curiously, and then admitted he was Mr. Miles.

"Ah, I am so happy! it has been for many days the dream, the hope of my life to have the honour for to see monsieur!"

"What do you want to see me for?" asked the master, who, like most Englishmen, only required to be brought face to face with a Frenchman to be ten times more blunt and abrupt than he was naturally, I suppose with the praiseworthy intention of keeping up the reputation we have earned among them.

"Monsieur, you do love the art; you do buy pictures—I am the artist, I do paint! it is my desire that monsieur should see my work."

Mr. Candy Miles had an objection to be dragged

anywhere to see a picture, and said he was engaged with Mr. Wills.

"My picture is not far off. It is close to the hand; it is here," said M. Zacque, opening the door he had come through.

Mr. Miles followed him into the room: it was scattered over with unframed pictures, brushes, bottles of varnish, and dirty rags. At one end stood an immense picture, taking up an entire side of the room.

"This is my picture," said M. Zacque, introducing it with a bow and a wave of the hand.

The master took up his position before it. The first impression was that the artist had been thoroughly ignorant of the first rules of art; brush in hand it seemed as though he had set to, putting aside perspective as superfluous, and, choosing the brightest colours on his palette, laid them on without regard to rule or harmony. It was supposed to represent two armies facing each other; one army on the left, the other on the right; one in red, the other in blue; in the centre were four officers, two for each army, and evidently taking a little conversation. The canvas on which this master-piece was painted was at least ten feet by eight, yet there was nothing else upon it.

Mr. Candy Miles' first impression on looking at it

was, that the artist was making fun of him in showing it at all; his next, that he was mad, and he turned round to examine him more closely.

M. Zacque was standing near intently gazing at the picture: there was so much childlike admiration expressed in his face, such entire devotion to his own labour, that the master was puzzled; the man was evidently in earnest.

"You do think it is a fine work, monsieur?" said the artist, turning round upon him. "Ah! it took me weeks for to conceive the face of that man. I had used to wander days on the Boulevards thinking for that face; one day it came upon me, and I fled to my room and painted it in," he indicated the face he meant among the mass of red coats, and sighed. "I was with my mother then; it was before she—she left me, monsieur, and she had used to say to me so gently, 'Ah, Zac! leave for to go your painting: it makes me weep to see you work;' but I say to her, 'Madam, I paint my picture in France, and I take it to the England, and I then show it to the rich men, and never let them say again the time of French painting is past—that they cannot go and paint *now*!' And I bring it, and I want to get it inside your Institution Nationale—academy you call it, monsieur—but they look at it, and say to me it is not the

rule, I am not one member. Do you understand me, monsieur ?”

“Yes. So you came to England to show your picture? Have you done so?” asked Mr. Candy Miles, more and more puzzled what to make of him.

“Yes, monsieur; I show it to one, two, three, but they shake their heads and look at me. Ah, monsieur, your countrymen stand so high upon the ceremony, they did not even say to me how much they liked it.”

“Perhaps they did not like it; did they say that?”

“Oh, no, monsieur; they could not say it to my picture, it is so fine. You like it for yourself, monsieur?”

M. Zacque came closer and bent his head anxiously to catch the answer; no one in general could accuse Mr. Miles of being soft-hearted, but he felt touched by this simplicity, and could not be abrupt.

“But, my friend, there are many things you have neglected: you have not studied your art sufficiently; for instance, everything lies flat on the canvas; there is no distance.”

M. Zacque shook his head.

“You will not buy it then, monsieur?”

Mr. Candy Miles started.

"Buy it!" he said.

There was evidently some method in the man's madness, if madness it were.

"M. Wills said to me, monsieur buys pictures."

"Did he? You know Wills, then?"

"Yes, monsieur; he is my best friend: I rent my rooms from him, and he tells me of his great friend monsieur the cotton-spinner, and wishes that he could come for to see my fine work."

"Mr. Wills told you I should buy your pictures, then?" said Mr. Candy Miles, angrily.

"He said very likely you would, monsieur," answered M. Zacque, cowering beneath the angry eyes bent on him.

"He told a lie then, and he knew it. Has Mr. Wills sold *you* anything?"

"Yes, monsieur. I buy these, and these," he turned over several pictures lying about. The master just glanced at them—poor worthless things.

"Are they any use to you?"

The storm was coming.

"No," with a French shrug. "I cannot sell them; but he is my friend, he wants money, and I had it; and when he make me get five hundred pounds for my work, he does me true service. Does he not, monsieur?"

"And takes his commission first!" shouted Mr. Miles. "Are you poor? do you miss the money?"

M. Zacque sighed. What need to ask the question, when his coat was threadbare, and his shoes so old?

"You shall have it back," said the master, as, hearing Mr. Wills' voice in the next room, he dashed through the open door to him.

That gentleman was standing in the middle of the room composedly twisting his beard, and started as though a lion had burst in upon him—

"Good God, Miles! what is the matter?"

The excited little cotton-spinner had his hand on him.

"You know the fellow in the next room?" he said, between his teeth.

Mr. Wills shrank back; he saw what it meant now.

"You know him! oh, yes, of course you do; and you've been extorting money from him on my name; on my name, I say. Do you hear?"

"I have been selling him one or two pictures, if that is what you mean, sir," said Mr. Wills, with a very poor attempt at dignity.

"Selling him pictures! Getting the poor fellow's money for things no one would pick up," screamed

the cotton-spinner. "And promising I'd buy his picture! You did promise; you know you did."

"Mr. Miles, if you are so violent ——"

"Did you promise, or did you not?"

"I said—yes, I certainly may have said it was probable."

"And you told a lie! You knew I couldn't buy the miserable daub. I thought the man was mad, but I find you put it into his head for your own profit. You got the man's money for a lie, I tell you, not for pictures; you lied in my name."

"Mr. Candy Miles, I cannot permit any one to call me a liar, and were you not an old man——" he stopped.

The little cotton-spinner, heedless of his wrath, looked an ill object for generous forbearance.

"You'd horsewhip me, would you? I should like to see you do it. Don't bravado me; you daren't touch me."

Indeed he would have been a brave man to have done so; Candy Miles seemed to have thrown aside the last thirty years, and was a working man again, compact, strong, and muscular: he was a match for the great fellow before him. Perhaps Mr. Wills felt this.

"Mr. Miles, this quarrel is unfit for gentlemen,"

he said; "what would you have me do, if you don't approve of my transaction with the scoundrel inside?"

"Give him back his money, and take back your pictures," was the imperial mandate.

"I will not, sir. Benjamin Wills is not to be dictated to by any man."

"Good-morning, Mr. Wills."

"No; stay a moment. If I do as you wish, will you ——?"

"Don't mix me up in this wretched affair," said the master; "I bid you act as an honest man, since you don't seem to do so unless you are looked after."

"But, Mr. Miles, really I cannot."

"Very well, sir."

The cotton-spinner's hand was on the door. Mr. Wills met the keen gray eyes.

"I will do as you wish," he said, slowly, and as if the words were being forced out of him.

"Very well, mind you do; my time's up. Good-morning," said Mr. Candy Miles, and was gone.

## CHAPTER XII.

### TEMPTATION.

It was a bright warm morning, and Mr. Francis was strolling in the grounds. Making his way in an idle, easy manner from one place to another, from the conservatory to the garden, from the garden to the broad meadow beyond, he commented on things generally to his faithful pipe.

“Other friends fail me,” he said, “but thou never, dear old pipe; I will write an ode, and immortalize thee! Pity the same thought never struck Byron; he would have made thee sacred in the eyes of man, and perhaps of women too, for evermore.

“This is an easy life we lead, my pipe and I, in the sunshine; but we begin to think—the fact just dawns upon us—that it is somewhat objectless; but we are idle vagabonds, and hate work, except just when it pleases us.

“There is my father, dear pipe; he cannot

understand our desultory pleasures : if he happen to look down upon us from the castle turret, he will despise me for sauntering about in this manner (it is rather early to smoke, perhaps); he would understand me more if I lost thousands yearly on the racecourse, or gambled; but as it is, when it pleases me better, and you as well, my pipe—for if I went into society you would have to give place to a cigar—to study, or sketch, or fish, or do nothing, he thinks his son is of foreign nature and was perhaps changed at nurse.

“ But it won’t be for much longer now; we are going to get married and reform; and in the meantime, dear pipe, we’ll enjoy the sunshine, and sit down on this rail.”

He had reached that end of the meadow where a slight wooden pailing portioned off the orchard, and, taking his seat on the top rail, in the shadow of an apple-tree, he took a scientific pamphlet from his pocket, and began to read.

Everything about him was bright, and warm, and gay. The tall, uncut grass, through which he had come, waved in submission to each faint breath of wind that, laden with the perfume of flowers, sighed softly, bowing the heads of the tall, gaily coloured weeds that intruded themselves and their flaunting

colours wherever they found an opening. The birds above and around were singing, and myriads of invisible insects raised their tiny voices in gladness at the sunshine.

Frank laid down his paper to take in his share of the brightness, and enjoy it. If there be such a thing as poetry of the mind, a feeling that can always put itself into words, and render its owner a poet : which throws a poetic veil over everything, and renders what is beautiful, doubly so ; Frank Miles possessed it to the utmost in his appreciation of nature. He loved Nature : it could always rouse him to quick feeling, and render him earnest and simple, however morosely inclined. He was almost child-like in his love of beautiful appearances, and often hushed the scepticism that bade him think they might be false, that his enjoyment should not be marred.

Just then the bright beauty round him sent a quick thrill to his heart, and made his pulse beat more quickly.

"Nature is my mistress," he said, with boyish gaiety, and springing from his seat. "I love her that she changes her face so often."

"Take care, Mr. Francis ! Oh, look at the apples tumbling !" cried a voice, and, indeed, at that moment his enthusiasm was damped by feeling

hard little substances falling about him like hail-stones.

Mary had come down into the orchard for some fruit, and, not seeing him, had shaken the tree under which he sat, and now stood laughing as he stopped stock still, with his shoulders drawn up to his ears under the infliction.

"For shame, Mary, to so ill-treat your best friend," he said, as they ceased falling.

"I beg your pardon, sir, I really did not see you, or——"

"Ah, Mary, take care; you saw me there, and the temptation to punish me was too great to be resisted."

"No, indeed, sir," protested Mary, looking up at him as she stooped for the fruit.

Ah, that face! those deep blue eyes and flushed cheeks, so difficult to look at and still remember they belonged to a servant, to one so far beneath him! He thought he had never seen it look so lovely; it seemed so perfectly in unison with everything round, that he could have fancied himself in Arcadia. All his cautions and resolutions faded away before that face; all he had said to counteract the influence it had over him, seemed base lies.

"Mary," he said, forcing himself to remember

her as she really was, "this must remind you of your old home—this beautiful green, and these trees."

"It doesn't need this to remind me of my home, sir, for it seems more like home than where they live now; but I recollect a very merry day I spent this time last summer in as beautiful a place as this—where Esther and I took out the Sunday scholars to tea."

"Were you and your sister both Sunday-school teachers, then?"

"Yes; at least I helped; but Esther was the head at most times."

"And you left all this and your friends to come down here?"

"Oh, Mr. Francis, don't think of those silly words of mine about going home. I have thought of them so often, and been quite unhappy that you should take them in earnest. I—I could not bear to go home now."

The beautiful face was looking at him entreatingly, and there were tears in the eyes.

"Why not, Mary?"

He got no answer; but the face flushed, and was turned away.

"No, Mary, you must not go. I could not

lose you now. You have kept your promise, Mary?"

She did not speak, and he put his arm round her.

"I want some reward for the apples," he said.

Mary raised her head, and the tearful eyes met his; a moment more, and he had left a kiss upon her lips. He had broken his resolution, and it came rushing back on him, spoiling his happiness, and poisoning that first kiss.

"Go in, Mary, you will be missed; go in, child," he said hurriedly, and left her to pick up her apples unassisted and go.

She went quickly, and was soon hidden by the trees, and Frank leant over the railing, and thought. First, with the influence of the face strong upon him, he tore at the chain that bound him to society. He would be free; who had a right to bind him for life to a woman for whom, if he had felt love, the feeling no longer existed; it was supplanted by a stronger and deeper one. If Mary loved him, he would sacrifice everything to her, and marry her, and go and live where the bonds of social position had no hold; where they would be unknown. They would be happy; he would like a companion unspoilt by the world, and so totally his own as she would be. He should never tire

of that face—under every new phase it had seemed only more beautiful—and she should not suffer for his pride and his position.

And then, when the momentary passion had spent itself, he was the first to turn upon himself, to contradict his own assertions, to sneer at his own scruples.

“Pooh! a kiss; pretty faces expect it, think of nothing beyond. I’ll buy the girl a ribbon, and then we shall be quits.”

There was no Arcadia round him now; so thoroughly must our happiness depend on our own feelings, that discontent clouds the sunshine, and he hated himself, despised himself, for having yielded an inch of the forbidden ground. The contented mood in which he had sauntered down was quite changed now, and he felt a contempt for himself.

“Why am I so scrupulous? Is it living among books that I have learned to venerate women, to look at them as all good and all pure? We’ll leave them, old pipe, and forget them. It is plain we are not to be trusted; we don’t know our own minds, and what is good for us, and till we do we’ll keep away; if we can’t present a stony shield to the fire, why, we’ll run away before anybody knows we are

burnt. We thought we were cured; all last week we kept her out of our thoughts; and when she came near us, our pulse didn't beat one throb more quickly; we wouldn't know she was in the vicinity. Yet this morning we've undone it all. We'll banish ourselves, take a knapsack, and have a walk on the continent for the improvement of our health."

He took a turn up and down among the trees, considered the proposition, and changed his mind again.

"That would not do; I've got a duty to perform, and I'll do it. I won't shrink from my word. I don't think I shall ever be happy in my love, so may as well put a stop to all the chances. A month or two back I loved Margaret Hall, and now——well, I am a fool; if I had my way, I should not care for Mary long; and then look at the waste of years with such a wife. I will marry Margaret; she loves me, and will make me a happy home, and I shall be pleasing my dear old father, who has been so good to me, and worked so hard to give me a position in life that I for a mere fancy have no right to throw away. And it shall be soon; I'll place my wife between me and Mary, and so settle it."

He had taken up his position on the railing again,

and, looking across the meadow, saw Miss Hall walking there. What brought her there? Perhaps it was dull work indoors with the Misses Miles and their endless embroidery; and they never came out in a morning because of their complexions: so she was alone.

Mr. Francis got off his seat, and walked towards her, with a fixed expression on his face not often there. She would not see him till he was close behind her, and then did not turn.

“Do you prefer walking alone, Margaret, or shall I join you?” said Frank, coming beside her.

If Mr. Francis Miles was quite disengaged, Miss Hall would be glad of his society, but she had no wish to keep him against his wish.

“Against my desire, Margaret,” he said, wondering why she drew herself up as she spoke, and thinking how a flush on her ordinarily pale face improved it. “Let us go into the shade in the drive, the sun is so hot here; and I want to speak to you, Margaret.”

“Indeed, sir? I thought you were engaged elsewhere.”

“Elsewhere! Why, Margaret, what do you mean?”

Miss Hall's thick eyebrows were drawn close over

her eyes, and she was looking straight before her, defiantly, but she did not answer.

Frank looked at her quietly, watching her face with the shade of her broad leaf hat on it; clinging to the quiet life he had marked out for himself; he dreaded temper, and felt himself wavering in his decision. So much so, indeed, that he let her walk on, contenting himself with keeping up with her, and let her break the silence when she pleased.

"I trust I did not disturb you, Mr. Miles," she remarked, after completing the act of demolition she had begun on a fern leaf she carried. "Pray, never think it necessary to leave other society for mine, because you see me alone."

"I left no one, Margaret; I was alone," Frank said very quietly, and certainly feeling very little disposed to conciliate her if she were otherways inclined. A show of jealousy tells two ways; sometimes it adds piquancy to the feelings and may be used with good effect, but it as often creates a feeling of nausea that may deepen into indifference, and is a dangerous experiment. "I was sitting on the railing with my pipe," said Frank.

Margaret turned her full bright eyes on him, and her lips curled into a sneer; she thought he was evading a lie very narrowly, and did not care to

conceal her contempt. He saw her meaning, and his face flushed at the insult.

"You do not believe me, Miss Hall; I am not in the habit of making misstatements about trifles. Who did you think was with me?"

Margaret smiled; her rage had vanished before his; if he had been philosophically quiet, as he generally was, she would, most likely, have pursued her favourite mood; but she had seldom seen him roused, and found much to admire in the novelty. Hers must have been an ill-regulated disposition, for the moment she felt she had the ascendant she became a tyrant. Hating weakness when it was opposed to her, she fell calm when she saw any fancied superiority in her adversary.

"Well, Miss Hall, make your charge," said injured innocence.

It was so silly, she did not like to do so.

"The little servant-girl, Mary, is the only being in petticoats I have spoken to for these last two hours."

"And what brought her in the orchard, pray?"

"My sisters, hospitably inclined towards you, probably intended treating you to apple-pie to-day, and the cook sent Mary to gather the fruit."

"You are always making fun of me, Frank."

"Do you not deserve it? Fie, Margaret! Jealous of a pretty face. Tell me the plot you had woven out, in which Mary was the heroine. I am only waiting for a good scheme to write a three-volume novel, and set the world on fire."

"Oh, I'll weave a plot for you: 'Once upon a time there was a very artful young gentleman——'"

"Stop, that won't do," cried Frank, "I am not going to malign my own sex in that way."

"If you don't, you won't draw a picture of true life," said Margaret. "All men are deceitful, I think; it seems part of their business to keep back half what they know."

"Thank you. Of course you include your father,"

"He is not in business."

"No more am I."

"He is very different from you."

"Eminently superior, I suppose. Take care, Margaret, or the jealousy will be on the other side."

"Don't match yourself against him; you will have no chance."

"What? in your estimation?"

Margaret nodded assent.

"When we are married, I shall be your lord and master," said Frank, "and I'll take you up to the

Grands Mulets, and keep you there for my own delectation."

"You would find me metamorphosed into an icicle, and could exercise your poetic talents in composing my elegy."

"A most poetical idea; stop a bit, Margaret, while I make a note of it. Just fancy bringing up nineteen impassioned verses to that climax, an icicle!"

"What nonsense, Mr. Francis! If I had to pass sentence on you, I could not inflict a more severe one than obliging you to get your own living for three months by your poetic talents."

"Ah, that is because you know me so familiarly; a prophet is never appreciated in his own circle. If I wore my hair very long, and induced my moustache to hang down, disconsolately, at the corners of my mouth, and instructed the laundress to leave out the stiffening in the preparation of my collars, you would recognize me as a genius directly."

"A genius, to you, then, is a man who neglects all the decencies of polite life as too trivial to occupy his great mind, and prefers remaining untidy and unkempt. Such men, Mr. Francis, are but pretenders, and call down ridicule on those they imitate, by their own absurdities. I wish, instead of laughing at them, sir, you would try

to emulate men of genius; you certainly have talents."

"Thank you," with a mock bow.

"No, Frank, I am in earnest; why do you waste your time so? Why not try and be great, too?"

"Because I am too modest, Margaret, I think," broke out Frank. "You say I laugh at genius; yet it is my very awe of great men and their doings that keeps me from intruding myself upon the world's notice. I have dabbled in most things, and persevered in none. Be it in painting or literature, I look up, from my own puny efforts, at the great minds who have thought and worked before me, and left such landmarks in the desert of science, and fancy I hear them say, 'You impudent pigmy, trying to emulate us, the giants looking down on every age,' and I smudge my canvas, or tear my manuscript, and come out and have a pipe, and think it is the most philosophical way of being happy after all."

"And the most selfish, Frank; is that your definition of a philosopher?"

"What would you have me do?"

"Devote your energies to the good of mankind generally."

“ Can’t; they won’t let me; they are the most difficult creatures to do a kindness to. Won’t even give you laurels for trying. To get on in the world you must not be a generation or so before it; keep up in the race, and you are hail-fellow well-met with all your *confrères*; but be first, and you must wait till they get up to you to receive their congratulations; and they will be so long coming that you may starve and die on your solitary perch, and when they get to your bones, why, they’ll give you a monument, and think you are well paid for the heat and exertion of the race, and long years of neglect and waiting afterwards.”

“ But while you live the constant hope of appreciation, the mere knowledge of being yourself beforehand of the world, must be a satisfaction many a great mind has lived and fed on.”

“ And found it poor sustenance, I should think, Margaret. Remember how many a noble heart has been broken in its struggle with the world and its worldliness; or rather we must fancy it; read their lives, and think why this great man died just when the world was going to put on the laurels, or that great man, just when we were coming up to him, only he didn’t know it. A broken

heart tells no tales; we haven't got a coroner for that yet, or how often the verdict would be 'Died from non-appreciation,' 'Murder against an unfeeling world.' Think of Chatterton in his garret, and in the midst of what riches and plenty he died to escape starvation. Ah, dear Margaret, there can be no fate harder than to be beforehand in the progress of intellect."

Margaret looked up in his face admiringly; she loved him dearly in such moods as his present one; he seemed more akin to her own feelings than when he showed himself light and irreverent and sceptical; which it must be owned he sometimes did.

"I wish my father could hear you speak as you do now, Frank; he thinks, sometimes, I fancy, that you have no such veneration for what is great and what he admires," she said, tenderly. "Why do you do yourself such injustice before him?"

"Because he does not like me, Margaret. Nay, do not contradict me; I know it is so. He will not oppose our marriage, dearest; but it is simply because such an opposition would make you unhappy, not from any want of dislike to me. It is improbable he would ever like your husband, even if he combined everything that is desirable; and I feel

I have no chance with him. He is jealous of you, Margaret, and your love."

An expression of pain crossed Margaret's face.

"I did not think you knew this, Frank."

"I have known it ever since I knew him. You are everything to him."

"We have been companions so long, and proved such dear ones. But my marriage need not separate us, Frank: let me have both of you to love; and you will learn to like him too. You do now, Frank?"

"Very much. Never fear, Margaret; we shall all be happy; he will be so if you are, and it shan't be my fault if you are not."

"Thank you, sir," said Margaret, archly. "And now, Mr. Francis, you must come into lunch. I hear the bell."

"What, leave this sunshine and these flowers to eat! Margaret, where is your poesy? Yonder is a trickling brook—look how it sparkles in the sunlight! Become a nymph, Margaret, and I will sit on the bank, and charm you with my pipe."

"And tobacco," laughed Margaret. "But you never eat lunch, do you?"

"Scarcely ever: it would break through my day-dreams too abruptly to eat cold game at midday;

or rather, it would spoil my dinner, which is more important. Come into my studio, Margaret, and you shall have some Rhine wine. I have a cellaret for my own peculiar drinking, and it is better than my father's sherry for a morning."

"So you sit there smoking and drinking——"

"And painting or reading."

"What a lazy life!" said Margaret. "No, I'll come into your studio afterwards; I've often wished to explore the mysteries of that room; and, like Blue Beard's chamber, I suppose I shall find it hung with my predecessors in your lordship's favour, in miniature. Eh, Frank?"

Frank started.

"Come and see," he said.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### AT THE MILL.

AT half-past ten Mr. Candy Miles' carriage and grays drove up to the door of his mill. It was one of that gentleman's secrets of success as a master, to have no fixed time for appearing. They were always expecting him, for they knew, from Mr. Grimmitt to the smallest child on the premises, that he might drop in upon them at any moment. He came at all times, sometimes between five and six, before the first "hand," and perhaps next day would never make his appearance till just as the last bell was about to be rung at night. Sometimes he came three or four times in the day, sometimes he was there all day, and some days he never came at all. He was even aware that there might be a sentinel posted on guard to give the word when the first rumble of his carriage was heard, so he sometimes took a hired cab, and often walked. On this occasion,

however, he had ordered out his carriage, and come down like a gentleman of property.

Alighting, he ascended his private staircase, and using his keys, got into his own room without meeting anybody. Here he glanced at the superscriptions of the letters lying on the table, and having thrust them unopened into his breast-pocket, burst through an opposite door, into the counting-house.

A tall, light-haired man, sitting over a ledger there, gave a feeble start, and then as profuse a greeting as, in his position of clerk, he dare.

The master eyed him sharply, honoured him with a short "Good-morning," and turned round on his heel.

"Martha!"

It was the same clear, quick call that he practised at home on Rascals, and was heard distinctly above the whirr of machinery around.

A thin, dark, sallow-faced woman, wearing the invariable small plaid shawl pinned across her shoulders and bosom, answered the summons.

"Anybody been this morning?"

"No, sir."

"Mr. Frank here?"

"No, sir; not been here this morning."

"Everything all right?"

"Yes, sir."

The master nodded his satisfaction.

This woman was his confidante and spy at the mill. No one came, no one stayed away, nothing was said or done, but she knew of, and, if she thought right, reported. Her master could have trusted her with untold gold, and knew it; more than that, he gave her his confidence. In the mill, she was mistrusted, disliked, and feared. At her ill-word a "hand" would lose his place; at her recommendation, get higher pay. For the rest Martha had little to boast. Twenty years of factory life had taken away any pretensions she might have once had to good looks or good temper, and left her an essentially plain, ill-tempered spinster of thirty-eight.

The master's next move was to go round the factory; this he did conscientiously; dodging from one place to another, till the whole had been visited and commented on, in his usual acute manner. In about an hour's time he reappeared in the counting-house, bearing in his hand a broad, square-looking bottle.

"Grimmitt!"

The cry was echoed from one to the other, till it reached that gentleman. When he came, which

he did in all haste, the master was still standing in the middle of the counting-house, holding the bottle.

“What has been in this bottle, Mr. Grimmitt?”

The overlooker examined the article carefully. In answering the master his people were as careful as if they were in a witness-box.

“Oil, sir,” was the conclusion arrived at.

“Is it one of our bottles? Do we ever keep our oil in such bottles?”

“Never, sir; this bottle isn’t ours.”

“Take it round, and see who owns it. Bring the owner and the bottle to me here. Remember I’m waiting—waiting.”

Mr. Grimmitt departed on his errand, and the master beguiled the time in his usual manner, viz., walking and whistling.

“Do you think, then, Mr. Miles,” timidly began the clerk, “that some of the ‘hands’——”

“Eh, what! Well, go on, Mr. Fairly.”

Mr. Fairly felt no inclination to do so, now that the master had stopped his walk to regard him, and regretted he had begun the sentence.

“I merely thought that you fancied it likely——”

Mr. Fairly found it impossible to proceed under the fixed attention with which he was being honoured, and broke down again.

"Thank you, Mr. Fairly," said the master; "I'm much obliged to you for your valuable suggestion, and will certainly consider it."

The clerk, conscious of having earned for himself the master's entire contempt, took refuge in an immense calculation before him, and the little tyrant resumed his whistling.

Presently Mr. Grimmitt returned. His utmost endeavours had failed to discover the owner of the bottle.

"Martha, who belongs to this bottle?" asked the master, when she appeared.

The answer came quick and ready,—

"Edward Jackson."

"Where does he work?"

"Near the second window in the fourth room."

The master threw a triumphant glance at the discomfited Grimmitt.

"Bring him here, Martha," he said.

Martha departed, and presently returned bearing with her the unfortunate lad. I say bearing, because no other word could be applied so aptly to the mode in which this invaluable woman brought forward her victim. She did not touch him, but kept so close and watched him so nearly, that on the faintest attempt at an escape, her hands would have been at

his throat, and her clutch immovable as a vice. Perhaps Edward Jackson was aware of this, for he came sullenly and unresisting.

“My lad, is this your bottle?” asked Chief Justice Miles.

The criminal looked round to see what evidence he might expect against him, before he answered. Finding Martha and Mr. Grimmitt still at hand, he nodded sullenly.

“And what’s been in it?”

A short pause, and then,—

“Oil, sir.”

“The oil that is bought for my machinery?”

Another sullen nod.

“No one would bring oil to the mill to use for my machinery, in such small quantities as half a gallon; so the bottle has been used to take it away. The owner of this bottle is a thief.”

The lad looked up with a quivering lip at the sharp, keen eyes confronting him; meeting them, he dropped his head on his breast again.

“You have taken this oil to sell; it would be no good to you to keep. Who buys it from you, my lad?”

“I can’t tell ye, sir.”

“Never mind, I’ll save you the trouble; I can soon

find out. Look here now: I won't punish you this time, but the next—and I'll keep a sharp eye on you, mind—you go, do you hear? You go!"

"Thank ye, sir; thee needn't fear," he said, and ambled off a different lad to what he was two minutes back.

"You wonder I didn't give him the sack at once, Grimmitt," said the master, turning to that edified witness; "but I saw by the lad's face he wouldn't cheat me again. And mind, don't be too rough with him."

Mr. Grimmitt bowed assent and returned to his duties, wondering in his own mind how it was the master had made a fortune, seeing he was such a fool. Mr. Candy Miles took a little more exercise, and had got into the middle of an operatic air, before he stopped; when he did it was galvanic, and terrified the nervous clerk again.

"Mr. Fairly, I want two hundred pounds."

"Yes, sir. Do you wish it at once?"

"Now."

Mr. Fairly rushed for his hat to go to the bank, and the master retired to his room to read *The Times*. The perusal of that paper was as regular an occupation with him as eating his dinner, and it lay ready for him on his private table, aired and stitched.

He had got through the first leader—for he read it systematically and always took the leaders after the “Latest Intelligence”—when an altercation outside attracted his attention.

“Mistress Martha, I admire your caution,” said a well-known voice, “and appreciate it. At my own place of business you would be invaluable in denying people; but you should learn to discriminate between a personal friend and a dun, before you are so positive. Now don’t say the master is not here, for I met the carriage going home empty.”

“Mr. Miles is engaged,” said Martha, resolutely, “and can’t be disturbed; I’ll take in your name.”

“Take in my name! take in Mr. Benjamin Wills——”

The master started up, and burst in upon the conference.

“What the devil do you mean making this infernal noise?” he said, savagely. “If you want to see me, Wills, come in, and don’t stand shouting there!”

Any other man would have been abashed at such a reception, but it could not affect Mr. Wills; and he followed the master into his private room quite unconcerned.

“Well, what do you want with me?”

The master put the question in his curtest manner.

Mr. Wills tried to shrug his great shoulders, as though wishing to deprecate the master's wrath.

"Did you return the money to that poor French devil?"

"Yes."

"What, all! No, Benjamin, no; don't tell me you gave it *all* back."

Mr. Wills had a notion of flinging himself into a theatrical attitude, and asking the master if he doubted the honour of a gentleman; but the keen, gray eyes had their effect on Mr. Wills, as on most folks on whom they were bent, and he found it difficult to keep up even the semblance of a lie.

"The little French devil, as you call him, is enthusiastic about art, and it was with difficulty that I induced him to give up any of my works."

"Oh, then, you did not have them all back?"

"No, not quite; he had taken a violent fancy to one or two, and would not return them. Besides, you know, master, I was persuading the man against my own interest," said Mr. Wills, with a burst of honesty that perhaps surprised himself, and made Mr. Candy Miles smile, "and that is a hard test for any man's eloquence."

"And which were they he could not be persuaded to give up? The large Reynolds, or that elaborate

Poussin?" pursued the master, pitiless as an Indian scalp-hunter for his victim. "You would spoil any trade you put your hand to, Wills, from pictures to cotton, if you used the big names so lavishly and with such foolhardiness. Why not call the wretched daubs Smith or Brown?"

"Because they wouldn't sell. It wouldn't deceive buyers like you, but some men buy only for the name, and one thing does as well for them as another. Go into the house, sir, of some of the smaller manufacturers, and see the pictures they hang on their walls—and they all have pictures more or less—hear the prices they gave for them, and, begad, I don't see why everybody should steal the cream, while I stand by, because I'm too honest to take what I can't perhaps quite honestly get."

Mr. Candy Miles regarded Mr. Wills with some astonishment.

"Why, Ben, what's come to thee, disclosing trade secrets; who's offended thee? Well, from dealers come to pictures: are you taking your Müller back with you?"

"I came to ask you whether I should or not?"

"When do you leave Manchester?"

"I think to-night. Mrs. Wills writes me that I am wanted in town. When shall we see you up,

master? I wish you'd give us a call, and stop at my place a day or two; Mrs. Wills would be delighted."

"Hush!" said the master. His watchful ear had caught some unusual noise in the factory.

"What's the matter? I don't hear——"

"Hush!" shouted the master, listening.

They heard hurried feet passing to and fro, on the bare floor outside, and then a half-suppressed scream, and the machinery stopped. Mr. Miles dashed out of his room. A crowd of men and women was collected at the farther end of the long room, into which his door opened.

In a moment he was amongst them, and they stood aside to let him see what they were gathered round. A boy leaning back, white and faint, was supported by a young woman, while Gilbert Farrel was binding up his left arm.

"How's he hurt?" asked Mr. Candy Miles.

The lad opened his eyes, and said, "You tell him," to Esther, who held him.

"He got too near one of the shafts, sir," Esther said, "and it caught his shirt-sleeve. If it hadn't have been for Edward Jackson, sir, he would have been dragged in altogether."

"Is the arm broken, Gilbert?" said the master,

with his face as livid as the boy's; "the young fool might just as well have been crushed altogether."

"I'm afraid it is broke, sir," said Gilbert; "at any rate, the flesh is almost stripped off the bone. I dare say it is too numbed for him to feel the pain overmuch. See, he's going off again. Some water, quickly."

The lad's head fell back heavily on his sister's arm; he had fainted.

"Get a cab, and take him to the infirmary at once," said Mr. Miles.

There was one at the door, that Mr. Wills had come in, and Gilbert lifted the lad in his strong arms, and carried him down, as gently and tenderly as a woman might a sickly child. Esther followed them.

"Where are you going? Stop where you are, young woman," said the master.

"He is my brother, sir, and I had better go with him; he would rather have me there, if he has to bear any operation."

"Don't go, and make a fuss at the place."

"I haven't done so here, sir," said Esther, quietly.

The master saw she was right, and let her pass on.

"Tell Mr. Farrel to go too; my name will make it all right there, and ensure him the best attention,"

he said, and turned back down the long room into his own.

An accident at his mill was what he most disliked ; he was proud that it was so much better ordered, and the machinery so much more carefully guarded, than in other factories, and to find a faulty part touched him to the quick.

" Damned young fool ! I thought there was no chance for any one to hurt himself, unless he did so on purpose," he muttered, " and I don't believe there is either."

To make sure, however, he went back into the factory. There, in the short time that had elapsed, everything had resumed its usual appearance ; the hands had returned to their work, and the machinery seemed by the noise it made, to be making up for lost time. As the master passed through, the women ceased their whispering, and plied their work with redoubled industry. It would have been no slight matter to have provoked him in his present mood, and they knew his face too well not to dread the contracted brow, and the quick restless eye beneath. He looked like an enraged lion whose wrath some hidden chain restrained.

" Grimmitt !"

The man came, and, divining what he meant, led

him to where the accident had taken place. The boy Jackson, was wiping the floor with a wet cloth, and there was a spot or two of blood near; all the tokens remaining of the frightful occurrence so lately happened. The master studied the place attentively, and then took out his watch.

“It is now twelve o'clock; by half-past one there must be a railing round this. Set the carpenters to work at once, and let no one else come near it, till it is done. Do you hear, Grimmitt?”

“Yes, sir.”

“If that's not long enough—though I could do it myself in half the time—keep them at it till it's done, and pay them for overtime; and let them make it strong and thick: no light work for me. And mind, if a ‘hand’ comes near till it is finished, he leaves the place at once. Now go and set them on.”

Grimmitt went to do his bidding nimbly. Tyrant that he was to the “hands,” he feared in his turn *his* master. Mr. Candy Miles turned to the lad—

“You are Edward Jackson?”

The boy raised his face from his work; it was the same face that scarce an hour since had hid itself abashed from those keen eyes, and even now, with the consciousness that his late act would palliate his former fault, it reddened at the recollection.

The master remembered it too, and was pleased to see how his appreciation of physiognomy had been justified.

"So you managed to save the poor lad from being dragged in, did you, my lad?"

"Yes, sir, but I couldna' sav' his arm, an' Mister Farrel stayed th' shaft."

The master nodded, and, putting five shillings in his hand, walked away.

The lad looked up surprised and grateful. He had been at the factory two years, and seldom got anything but hard words and blows; he was under Mr. Grimmitt, and had a hard life of it.

"I wish I had na' took th' oil," he said, with a quivering lip, and looking after Mr. Miles as he passed up the long room.

"Get up, with you; don't kneel there doin' nothin'. Off to your work, or you'll get the strap."

The lad clapped his money in his pocket, and, throwing a defiant look at Grimmitt as he stood over him, ambled off to his regular work. *That* was his master; Mr. Miles was so only in name, or he might have been a better lad.

"But I'll cheat *he* when I can, an' when I be's a bit older, I'll break his own strap on his back," he

muttered between his teeth, and with the black, sullen look on his face again.

Indeed he was only expressing the general feeling Mr. Grimmitt excited in all who had the ill-luck to work under him.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### MARY.

WHICH of us, in summing up the amount of our offences, owns to every little one of them? When Tom gives over to his father the list of debts he has incurred at college, are there not two or three left out? It would be no good vexing the worthy vicar by telling him of the fifty lost at cards, and still owing. The vicar is so prejudiced against gambling, and Tom must manage to screw it somehow out of his next year's allowance. So we put them aside, and only the creditor remembers them, and prepares the writ for the unconscious youngster.

This being allowed, then, as we have only as yet been favoured with Mr. Francis Miles' synopsis of his sayings and doings with Mary Rueby, it can hardly be supposed that meeting in the orchard was the first time they had been together. Mary was often allowed to go home and see her parents, and twice, when she was coming back again, Mr. Francis

happened, by the most curious coincidence, to be going home exactly the same time. There was nothing in it, of course; but still Frank might have passed on; there was no absolute necessity that because they were going the same way, they need walk together.

But Frank just then took upon himself to scout the absurdity of making such a difference between master and servant. "Indeed," he said, "I think it criminally wrong; here the women go on complaining at the degeneracy of servants, and do they do anything to raise them in the social scale? Do they talk to them, and teach them to have higher ambitions than wearing a smart bonnet? They have intellects and feelings as we have, and I have no doubt only require to be brought in closer contact with those whom a mere chance of birth has placed above them, to become an improved and enlightened race."

Mr. Francis forgot, or perhaps did not choose to remember just then, that he had not thought of this when he had seen their cook—a fat, coarse woman of forty—coming home from her "Sunday's out." On the contrary, seeing her one evening, and letting her walk on before him, he had taken notice of the general brilliancy of her costume, and amused Miss Margaret Hall after supper by a clever caricature of

it, and been wittily sarcastic on the subject of women's dress in general.

And those same walks, meaning so little to Mr. Francis, were regarded very differently by Mary. At first, when his kindness and attention had used to bring a glow to her cheeks and make her heart beat more quickly, she had learnt to think of him humbly and say, "He is only kind because he thinks I am among strangers and lonely, and it will wear off presently." But when it did not do so, nay increased, could she be blamed for loving this fine gentleman, with his fine diamond ring, and his beautiful clothes, and pleasant, kindly manner?

Still she had never thought that any such feeling could set aside his marriage with Miss Hall; she took her share of the pain and loved him quite humbly; he could never be anything to her but the kindest master, and she thought if she could see him, and hear him speak to her as he always did when they met, she would be satisfied. But we grow old in love; a single day may so change our feelings that we scarce recognize ourselves of yesterday, and under its influence Mary's childlike simplicity and humility of thought soon disappeared. Little kindnesses, an admiring glance, a gentle word, which Mr. Francis, in making up the category of his offences,

forgot all about, were remembered and treasured by the recipient. The very possession of a secret, if indeed, such it could be called, made an important person of Mary in her own estimation; he trusted her, he placed his honour in her keeping, and ah! how faithfully she would guard it, the foolish little lass thought; not even Esther must know, and they might starve her, or kill her, but that proud lady should never know it.

Mary did not like Miss Hall; perhaps the dislike was mutual, though Margaret was kinder to her than she was to servants generally, and once, with a blush, had dropped a guinea in the girl's hand for some slight service rendered. Mary could not have known that it was a sop with which Margaret was appeasing her own conscience, for the doubts she had had of the girl; but she did not like taking the money, and had never cared to spend it. It lay in her little workbox upstairs, then, as though ready to be thrown back upon the giver when the feeling Mary cherished against her should become insupportable.

Then that meeting in the orchard had set all Mary's thoughts on a more ambitious track. Where they soared to I dare not divine; perhaps she dare scarcely follow them herself. Reason seemed to

stand aside, and let imagination have her full wing. On her road to town that afternoon, Mary hardly felt the ground she trod on, her sole feeling was one of perfect elation, and she went so buoyantly and cheerily that she may have sung as she tripped along from very happiness.

I have so often found that when wrought up to some exaggerated conception of earthly happiness, when life has donned its gilded dress and a fancied future has been revealed to me unexpectedly and inexpressibly bright, some heavy calamity has been at hand to crush me, some unexpected affliction is upon me, that I have learned to dread the elated feeling. It may be reaction makes it more intense; for crowd bitter grief upon the happy, and you produce a revulsion more deep than if the afflicted had been partly stricken before.

Mary's light careless step led her unexpectedly into a house of woe. It was the morning of Bob's accident, and Mrs. Rueby was lifting up her voice in loud and active lament. Her boy would be a cripple; her fine handsome boy, that she'd always thought to see grow up and get married to one of the best, would be deformed, and all because they had come to this filthy town; there was a curse on them, she knew there was, and they would never prosper.

"It is not so bad as mother will believe," said Esther, who was at home. "I was with Bob this morning, and they said they could reset the arm, and that the bone would knit together again in time."

"Ay, in time; i' what time?" repeated her mother, in her shrillest tones: "th' sam' time i' took to cure poor Cook's fever down th' street. Jist li' all them hospitals, or what thee calls 'em. They say he's gettin' better an' he'll out come this time next week, an' one mornin' Mrs. Cook goes an' asks when they thin' he'll come out, an' th' doctor jist looks queerly at her, an' does na' speak, an' th' nurse comes an' tell her he'll niver come out, save to his grave, an' he died th' night afore; and they'll do th' same wi' my lad, I'm sure they will;" and Mrs. Rueby fell to rocking herself to and fro, varying her complaints from time to time from her past hearsay experience of public institutions and her own maternal laments.

It was the first Mary had heard of it, and it damped her high spirits woefully.

"You never sent up to tell me," she said, as she stood leaning against the window ledge swinging her bonnet disconsolately by the strings, and watching Esther stooping over a great jowl with her arms half buried in dough.

"Why should I, my dear? You could have done no good and would only have fretted," said Esther, with her cheerful voice.

"It doesn't seem to have made you very down-hearted, and I suppose I could have stood it as well as you."

Esther looked up quickly, and her eyes glistened at this ill-timed reproach.

"Because I do my work, do you think I do not feel it, Mary?" she said.

"Still you might have let me know," Mary answered, fairly bursting into tears (which her former elation had much to do with). "I shall come home some day, and find you all dead, and never have heard a word about it before."

"Come, Mary, don't make mother more miserable than she is; that will never do," said Esther, finding it necessary to leave her occupation, and comfort her sister a bit.

In the evening, a neighbour having dropped in, Esther was at liberty to walk a little way home with Mary, and accordingly left Mrs. Rueby to pour out her griefs, and get comfort from the friendly caller, who just came in to see how the "missus" bore up, and tell her it was nothing out of the way, and that she ought to be surprised and thankful

every time she saw either her husband or Esther come home with whole limbs out of that den of a factory, instead of thinking of the present affliction.

"Mary," said Esther, as they went long, "do you remember promising me, before we left our old house at S——, that if ever you got a sweetheart when you came to this town, that you would tell me?"

"Well, and what if I did?"

"Why, that you haven't kept your promise, for you never told me, and I've waited expecting you would."

"I don't know what you are talking about, for I've nothing to tell you," blurted out Mary; "how should I tell you about a sweetheart, when I haven't got one?"

"Who was that you were walking with last Thursday fortnight, after you had been home?"

"Last Thursday fortnight! Law, Esther! how can I remember the exact night?"

Mary was no match for Esther. The elder sister's probing questions went straight to the point, and it wanted a bolder pout and more subtle speech to turn them aside than Mary could command.

"If you have ever walked home any night with any one, that is sufficient; tell me his name," said

Esther, coolly. "Don't think I want to scold you, Mary; I have too much confidence in you to believe you can need it. But you must tell me all about it."

"All about it," repeated poor Mary. "I only walked home with Mr. Francis one night, if that's who you mean."

"Mr. Francis! the master's son!"

"Yes, yes; but only once," said Mary, hastily, and taking alarm; "he overtook me, and walked home with me one night, and asked about you and mother."

Esther did not answer, and walked on for some distance thinking. It never crossed her mind that there could exist then any greater familiarity between her master's son and Mary, because she believed she would have heard of it, and because she trusted her sister too well to suppose she would tell her wrong; but the possibility of such an intercourse in the future struck her with alarm and fixed her attention.

Mary waited anxiously for her to speak, turning over things in her mind, wondering how much was suspected and how much really known, pondering how she should parry the knowledge and the suspicions. If the difficulty in playing at cards exists

in your not knowing your adversary's hand, so in a conversation like this lies the same disadvantage. Mary had hazarded a bold assertion in saying her intimacy with Mr. Francis only consisted in one walk home, and remained in perfect dread lest Esther knew more than she showed, and had detected the lie.

"I am glad it is only as you tell me," Esther said at last, and speaking gravely and thoughtfully. "I hardly know what I feared, Mary; but when you never told me anything of it, and I heard you had been seen with a gentleman, it made me very unhappy. Anything happening to you, dear, would be harder to bear than Bob's accident."

"You need not fear for me, Esther," Mary said, deeply relieved.

"Mr. Francis is engaged to be married, too?"

"Yes, to Miss Hall. She doesn't care much for him though; she is always snapping at him for something or other," said Mary, rudely.

"Still, my dear, that makes no difference to you," said Esther, with that simplicity that, showing itself often in the midst of her shrewdness, was not a little strange and amusing.

## CHAPTER XV.

### SUSPICION.

THE master's little dinner-party was just about to break up; his guests, three in number, having some time since declared their intention of going, had left their seats, and were on the point of assuming their great-coats.

On the hearth, with one foot on the grate, stood the master, his face slightly flushed with wine, having his last joke. His victim was Mr. Pilliger; that gentleman having excited his wrath by expounding one or two of his favourite schemes for making fortunes, during dinner, was now "getting it" in return.

"I never heard, Mr. Pilliger," the master was saying, "what became of that coal-mine company you were getting up some six months ago, when you wanted to make my fortune for me, only I was too dull to see it."

"It fell through, Mr. Miles; you were not the

only one who failed to see it with my eyes: so, through want of capital, I was fain to leave it for future generations to benefit themselves with. It will be a splendid thing, though."

"I suppose they'll be much obliged to you for the kindness," pursued the master, with his peculiar smile.

"No, I dare say they won't appreciate it," Mr. Pilliger said, passing his hand through his hair, and speaking carelessly; "maybe in the future generation there won't be a single man who could work it as well as I could; such enterprises all depend on how they are worked."

"I see, and your clay bed, down in the south; what of that?"

Mr. Pilliger laughed, and said the master was infringing; those were state secrets.

"Only opened to the shareholders, I suppose," said Mr. Candy Miles.

The lawyer nodded assent, and turned towards the hall for his coat. Mr. Wills followed; only the master and James Hall were left in the gallery. The latter, who had been turning over a folio of drawings, closed it suddenly, and was about to follow them.

"Stop a bit, Jim."

Mr. Hall came up to the fireplace; his ill-health was a sufficient excuse for never taking much wine, and he was on this occasion quite placid and cool.

"I wish you'd leave your house at Prestwich, Jim," said the master, with his hand on the other's arm, and his eyes fixed on his face. "I don't think it's healthy, you don't look well to-night."

"I am as well as usual, Candy, thank you. It is this hot room; my house is perfectly healthy; better than this, I should think: it stands so high."

"I don't like the neighbourhood."

There was something in the master's tone that implied more than a mere objection to village nuisances, and Mr. Hall turned round upon him.

"It is too near Mr. Pilliger to be healthy," pursued the master; "the companionship of a man who is always telling you of the chances you are losing by being satisfied with two and a half per cent. for your capital, can't be good for any man's constitution, much less for yours, Jim, who thinks everybody is as soft as yourself in money matters, and as honest."

"Nonsense, Miles," said Mr. Hall, uneasily, "you are prejudiced against the man."

"No; when I take a man's measure I am not often deceived. At any rate, James, you won't

enter into any of his speculations without first advising with me."

Mr. Hall moved away without answering; his eyes had a bright, restless light in them, and his face was paler than usual.

"Stop here to-night, Jim; don't go home," said the master, leaving his former argument on hearing his other guests outside. •

"No, the walk will do me good, thank you; we shall get a coach at the stand; it is not above a mile and half distant, and it is a beautiful night."

"Charming night," echoed Mr. Wills.

The master followed them out. It was a clear, soft night, light, although no moon was visible, and only the stars studded the sky.

Mr. Candy Miles left them at the gate, and they went their way; Mr. Wills going gallantly forward, trolling out a song that startled the stillness of the night, and the other two gentlemen following arm-in-arm.

Some hundred yards from Madapollam House gate, a little pathway, with a stile at the end, turned into the high road, and here Mr. Wills saw in advance of him, two figures standing. He stopped singing, and coming nearer, saw it was a man and woman. The former, turning suddenly and

seeing him approach, came out hastily into the road, and his companion went down the pathway.

“Begad!” exclaimed Mr. Wills, pulling up short, “it’s Master Frank; the sly young devil! Wonder if my friend Hall saw the little transaction.”

The same thought may have struck Frank, for he looked anxiously at the gentlemen coming up; but they evidently had not, the distance was against them.

“Fine evening, Mr. Francis,” was Mr. Wills’ somewhat ironical greeting.

“Very fine.”

“Are you going towards town?”

“No, I am going home;” and Frank moved forward to speak to the other gentlemen, and, having exchanged a few words, bade them good night, and went his way towards home.

He did not stop at the stile as he repassed; the little companion may have still been lingering there, but he went by, tearing on towards home, in a savage, ungentlemanly way, asking of himself angry remorseful questions as he went.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## FINE DRY WINE.

MR. WILLS called three days afterwards at the mill. He had something to tell Mr. Candy Miles; it was of no importance, but he thought he ought to know. Mr. Wills' natural goodness of heart would, of course, have dictated silence on the subject for evermore; but as the father of the young man in question, the master ought to know how he was endangering his prospects, &c. In other words, Mr. Wills, besides being an inveterate meddler, had a grudge against Frank; that young gentleman having thought proper to assume high airs towards him on one or two occasions, when Mr. Wills had been a little too familiar in public to please him; he not being proud of the acquaintance, either for himself or his father. So Mr. Wills thought if he could get him into trouble he would; and, accordingly, told his tale; only adding such little embellishments of his own, as were strictly necessary to make it worthy of notice.

While the master listened, standing opposite the narrator, he studied him attentively. He had so little faith in the man, and so thoroughly believed he would not scruple to lie to make a little mischief, that he generally trusted what he gathered from his face, rather than from his words.

"Take care what you are saying, about Mr. Hall and my lad; they'd either of 'em kill you, big as you are."

"Oh, doubtless Mr. Francis would wish me to be silent, but I'm not afraid of him. There's no harm, and I dare say it is all right; he has only found out she's a devilish pretty girl, which she is, and I saw them walking up the lane by your house, begad!"

"When?" asked the master.

"Three nights back. By Jove! I'd half a mind to have dodged them; but my natural delicacy came in my way, so I didn't."

"Your natural delicacy!" sneered Mr. Candy Miles. "I wish it would keep you from meddling with other people's affairs, and teach you to keep your mouth shut."

And perhaps not caring to continue the conversation, for he hated tale-bearing like a schoolboy, he left his own room for the counting-house.

"The usual thanks," said Mr. Wills; and, being alone, he pulled out his case, and lit a cigar.

As the first fragrance scented the air, Martha put in her head at one of the doors.

"Come in, come in," said Mr. Wills; "never make a stranger of me; always continue your little avocations without the slightest regard for my presence."

"I don't want to coom in," said Martha, throwing a meaning glance at the cigar, which Mr. Wills, quite unconscious that he was breaking the rules, waved about ostentatiously.

Martha retired at one door, and the master burst in at the other.

"Who the devil's smoking? Come, Wills, this won't do."

"Do you object to it so early?"

"So early—no! I don't care if you smoke before you get up, in bed if you like, but not in my mill. I should have the place down in a week. By-the-by, Wills, have you got any wine by you now?"

"Yes, some of the finest in the land."

"What sort? Got any champagne?"

"Some very magnificent—fine dry wine," said Mr. Wills. "Just suit you, Mr. Miles."

•

"Thank you," said the master, very quietly; "I don't want to buy any, I've some on hand. I thought you might like to exchange. I'll have it brought up. But, Mr. Wills, supposing I buy fifty dozen from you, how shall I be sure that it is all the same as the sample bottle you give me to taste?"

"What the deuce is he at now?" thought Mr. Wills, avoiding the master's eye. "Why, Mr. Miles, I should give my word of honour that, as far as I could tell, it should be the same."

"Oh, you'd warrant it, would you?"

"Yes; certainly."

"And you wouldn't be ashamed to own it afterwards?" said the master, still looking queerly at him.

"No, Mr. Miles; I am never ashamed of my transactions, past or present," said Mr. Wills, grandly, but not without a certain qualm of conscience.

"That's a good boy," said the master, briskly; and, having made a clear space on the floor just by Mr. Wills' feet, he went out of the room, and returned presently with a champagne bottle in each hand, and followed by two or three girls similarly laden, all of which were deposited in the space he had cleared.

"Do you know that wine, Mr. Wills? Or shall I open a bottle?"

Mr. Wills took up a bottle and examined the label for mere form's sake: he knew the wine well enough.

"That wine you sold to a friend of mine. He came to me, said he wanted some champagne, and I put in a word for you. The result is, my friend calls, you give him a sample bottle, of which he approves; and he knows what good wine is, and gives you a large order for the same, at your own price, Mr. Wills. And you send him this; which he declares to be no more like what he tasted than sweetened pop. You thought, as he was a stranger, it didn't matter; you would probably never see him again, and might as well get as much out of him as you could then. No, I know you wouldn't have sent me such wine; but I would sooner you had than served him so. I am obliged to look you up, you see, Mr. Benjamin Wills, now and then; a month ago it was the Frenchman, now it is this wine. Really, if you don't mind, I shall be obliged to cut your acquaintance."

"For fear of contamination," said Mr. Wills, with a ghastly laugh. "Damn it, Mr. Miles, you cut a fellow up without the slightest mercy, and take away his character——"

"Not in your case, Mr. Wills."

"How did I know the wine was not the same? My agent assured me it was. My only fault was in not looking after it more closely; and yet you accuse me, begad, of dishonesty!" and Mr. Wills drew himself up with insulted majesty.

"Ah! I dare say I am wrong. Beg your pardon, Mr. Wills," said the master; "only don't do it again, that's all. It's unpleasant, after recommending a fellow, to have this rubbish sent. You must change it for me, Mr. Wills; of course my friend couldn't keep it. Hark! there's Mr. Hall and Frank outside."

The master went out as he spoke, and passed Mr. Francis coming in.

"Good morning, Mr. Wills,"

"Good morning," replied Mr. Wills, suddenly becoming aware that the wine was still on the floor, by catching a smile on Frank's face, and following his eyes.

"Not so good as it might have been," said Frank, mischievously, and taking in the position at once.

"No; my agent made a mistake. A gentleman cannot always be expected to look to all these little things himself. And as sure as you trust to other people to do a thing, it is done wrong."

"So I find," said Mr. Francis, with grave sarcasm.

Mr. Wills coloured, and looked savagely at the young gentleman as he occupied himself with examining one of the labels. Frank was short, like his father, and had a curiously quiet way of going about things, as though he saw more in them than he cared to say.

"Have you tried it?" he said, looking up; "it is very bad."

"No, I have not."

"I wonder, now, for whose delectation this sort of wine is made," Frank said, pursuing the subject, supremely indifferent to Mr. Wills' discomfiture. "I suppose there are people who will buy and even drink it."

"People's tastes differ, Mr. Francis. All young gentlemen are not such good judges as yourself of wine."

Frank's blue eyes had a mischievous gray light in them just then, as he raised them to Mr. Wills' face.

"Thank you, I know nothing of champagne; I seldom drink it."

"Do you smoke?" said Mr. Wills, determined to change the subject of conversation at all risks, and proffering his cigar-case.

"I do smoke, but not cigars."

"Do you always prefer a pipe, then?"

"Always, except, of course, when I cannot introduce it, and where I can't I seldom introduce myself; so it comes to much the same thing."

"The ladies object to the pipe, I suppose?"

"I seldom move from my own circle, so have no means of judging," said Frank, coldly.

"What is Miss Hall's opinion on the subject?" pursued Mr. Wills, who, thinking of the previous night, fancied he was turning the tables very cleverly.

"I am not aware that Miss Hall has any objection to it."

"Is she quite well this morning?"

"Quite well, thank you."

Mr. Wills expressed himself delighted, and had nothing more to say on the subject. Mr. Francis had assumed his coldest aspect, and taken up *The Times*. Mr. Wills stretched himself on the hearth, yawned, and began to whistle. Frank looked up at him with elevated eyebrows. Mr. Wills met the look, apologized, and was silent. Frank resumed his paper; there seemed to Mr. Wills an immense amount of quiet contempt, even in the way he folded the sheets. Mr. Hall and the master came in, and Mr. Wills turned to them.

"Come from Prestwich this morning, Mr. Hall?"

"Yes."

"Have you walked?"

"I have, Mr. Wills."

"Ah, you are right, sir; nothing like a long, early walk for invigorating the system and bracing the nerves; should do it myself, only can't spare the time, begad. By the way, your neighbour is about to leave you?"

"If you mean Mr. Pilliger," said Mr. Hall, stiffly, "he is."

"Ah, yes, begad, of course. I say, it looks very suspicious, though, when a lawyer, in the full fling of business, leaves his connections and his town, begad——"

Mr. Wills was lolling on the hearth, speaking as though he attached little or no importance to what he was saying; but the indifference may have been assumed. Mr. Hall's face lost colour.

"What do you mean?" he said.

"Nothing at all, I assure you. It only just then came across my mind that I saw his house advertised for sale this morning. Of course it is old news to you."

It might not have been so, though, for Mr. Hall caught at the table as he stood, for support, and put one hand over his eyes; his face was very white, and

he was breathing heavily. Frank threw down his paper, and wheeled an arm-chair to the fire for him.

"You have walked too far, this morning, sir. Let me take your coat," he said.

"Thank you, Frank, thank you; you are very kind," he spoke feebly, and laid hold of the lad's shoulder to steady himself: he seemed quite shaken.

"Come, Mr. Hall; what's this? cheer up," put in Mr. Wills; "here's Martha; now then, hot brandy-and-water. Were you up late last night?"

Mr. Hall started at the loud coarse voice, and leant back in his chair, with his hand still on Frank's arm.

"Have you seen Margaret this morning?" he asked, gently.

"Yes, sir; she is quite well, in town, I think, with my sisters," Frank said.

"I should like to see her. I grow frightened when this pain at the heart comes on. My father died of it."

Mr. Candy Miles had busied himself with mixing the brandy-and-water, and now gave it to his friend.

"You should never give way like that, Jim; it is only a spasm," he said, yet regarding him with an anxious face. "You must not go home to-day; come back with me, and go to bed early; you'll be all right to-morrow."

Mr. Hall made no objection. Margaret was at Mr. Miles's on a visit for a week ; so he would go too.

"Wait a bit," said the master, "and I'll go back with you ; the carriage is at the door. I just want to speak to Grimmitt."

He went out into the mill to find that gentleman. The one, o'clock bell was ringing, and the people going out. He came upon Mr. Grimmitt standing by Esther Rueby, who was picking some stray bits of cotton from her machine.

"Put on your bonnet, Esther, and I'll walk home wi' you," the gallant overlooker was saying.

"Thank you, Mr. Grimmitt, I'd rather go alone."

"Now, don't say that ; don't put on that touch-me-not look, Esther ; it makes you look so tempting," pursued Mr. Grimmitt.

Esther turned round, and taking her shawl from the wall, put it on. Factory life and factory work are apt to grind the sentiment out of any woman, and there was not even a deeper colour on her cheek ; she was simply indifferent to Mr. Grimmitt's society, and was too tired, or too absorbed in her work, to be indignant.

The other spinners from that room had gone before, and there was only the master standing

behind the unconscious Mr. Grimmitt. Esther saw him first, and, dropping her quiet curtesy, went away. Grimmitt turning to follow her, still bent on carrying out his proposal, came face to face with him, and was rendered thereby very much discomfited, and very red.

"You don't seem very successful in your love-making, Grimmitt," said the master, with his little keen eyes twinkling.

"It's on'y the young 'ooman's modesty, sir," the overlooker said, tumbling over the words as though they were stones.

"Take care you don't try it too much. I won't have the spinners meddled with. The girl seems very modest and proper behaved, and evidently don't want your attentions; so mind you don't force them on her."

"Bless you, sir, they likes it," replied Mr. Grimmitt, whose standard of female virtue was anything but high.

Perhaps the master's was not much higher, for he only laughed, probably thinking Grimmitt's physique was scarcely fitted for conquest. And not considering it necessary to take him further to task on that subject, he proceeded with the business on hand.

## CHAPTER XVII.

## A RESOLUTION.

MR. FRANCIS had come to a resolution. My reader must not be sceptical as to his powers of keeping to one, but reconcile his seeming inconsistency, as *he* did to his own conscience, by saying he could not carry out to the letter resolutions in which other people were concerned, and where an act over which he had no control, might overturn the whole. We have all of us some such comfortable logic at hand when we want it.

But this was a compact in which he only had to act, and he was determined to carry it out. He was going abroad. He got his maps, and traced out a course for himself on the Continent. "I am in a fix, and I'd better run, and leave Mary and Margaret to get on as they can. I thought I could stand stopping here, and I can't. It's no good: whenever I see that girl I go to her; so I'll get away for a bit, go and see some of my old chums, and then come back and be Benedict. We've been

at home too long, old pipe, too much among the women, and have grown stupid."

When Miss Hall heard his resolution she could not but be hurt by it.

"Your determination is very sudden, Frank. I did not know you intended going away at all this year."

They were standing by the drawing-room fire in the twilight, and Margaret came and laid her head against his shoulder.

"Is home so very unattractive, so very dull, Frank, that you need be always leaving it?"

"You spoke of my leading a lazy life, dear Margaret. Perhaps you only gave my own thoughts words; and I have found life too objectless."

"We women find to please those we love, sufficient object for a life, and yet you men fret and fume under the infliction in a month."

"And would you have us so, Margaret? I think women would despise us if we were always at their apron strings."

"Ah, but for a little time. I had hoped you were coming home to Prestwich, Frank, with my father and me. It is cruel to have disappointed me so," and behold! in the eyes of Margaret Hall, "who didn't care," there were big tears.

The unhappy victim of necessity sighed. Perhaps

if he had not come so very lately, to that very fixed resolution of which I spoke; and perhaps also but that he suspected he might deserve to stand in his own, and perhaps in Margaret's estimation, too, as a gentleman of very unstable disposition, and liable to be blown this way and that, like a weather-cock, at every sigh; perhaps, I say, he might have allowed himself to be persuaded to stay; but as it was, he stood firmly to his resolution, and Margaret, once refused, was not the girl to ask again. She even tried to hide from him her grief at his intention, and, taking up her position on the opposite side of the fireplace, began to ask him about his proposed route, and make mischievous comments thereon.

Margaret looked very handsome that night; her face was flushed, and the dress of light silk she wore, with its ruffle of soft lace at the throat, suited her well. So her father thought, for, coming in as the two stood talking, he remained still a moment, watching her fondly, and then, coming up to the fire, put his arm round his darling caressingly.

"So you have made up your mind to leave us, Mr. Francis," said Mr. Hall.

"I am going away for a little time, sir; but shall soon be back again."

"Scold him, papa, for going," said Margaret, and repenting she had said it at all when she looked up into her father's face, and saw the frown upon it.

Mr. Hall was very keen upon ever so small an appearance of neglect of his daughter, and evidently thought this a grave one.

"I am sorry, Mr. Francis, you think it necessary to go at all," he said, gravely.

"I regret it too, sir; but find it will be necessary," replied Frank, assuming, as he often did when he thought any one was trying to hector him, his most flippant manner.

"Are you quite sure it is necessary," pursued Mr. Hall, almost with a sneer.

The tone made Frank start.

"Do you doubt my word?" he said, angrily.

"Father! my dear father!" expostulated Margaret.

"No, sir, I do not. I only thought you might have deceived yourself as to the necessity. Our postal communication is so universally spread, that unless a personal attendance is absolutely required, it seems to me an unnecessary expenditure of time and money, to make the journey."

He spoke quite quietly, but there was a steady determination in his tone that roused Frank. "With

such a man as this for my opponent," he thought, "I have been playing a daring game to think even carelessly of Margaret." But it only increased his desire to be gone.

"In my case personal attendance is absolutely necessary," he said, with a stress on each word.

Mr. Hall bowed, and declared himself satisfied.

"When do you propose going?"

"In a day or two," said Frank, cutting short the conversation by leaving the room; and who, though he was determined to go, was by no means prepared to seize his carpet-bag and rush off by the next train. Before that young gentleman could do anything, or go anywhere—unless, indeed, he was following one of those dangerous impulses of his—he was obliged to take at least one pipe while he thought it over, and on the subject of equipping himself for a journey it often required an entire morning and a series of smokes to decide how he should take everything he could possibly want, and yet be cumbered with no luggage. First of all, he was sure to meet with a good trout stream, and must take his fishing tackle; he could never buy such artificial bait as he had, for he had made it himself, and there was not a rod in a hundred that would suit him, if he didn't take his own.

Secondly, he must have his books; he might be

weather-bound in some small German village for a week, and what a position if he had no literature; oh! his books were decidedly necessary. And what should they be? perhaps it occurred to him he would study perspective, and must take all the books pertaining to that desirable goal. And, by-the-by, there was that novel in MS. by his friend, Theodore Brooks, who had asked him for his opinion of it. Perhaps if he got it out, he should find time to look it over, at home he was sure he never should; and, talking of MSS., he must take his own. He was sure to be in a good mood for composition some time during his absence, and if he had not his references at hand, there was no knowing what grand thought might be lost to the world, for want of the connecting link.

Thirdly, of course his artist's materials were strictly necessary; there was a strong inducement to add to these some chemical experiments he was engaged upon; but he could not take his furnace, light and portable as it was, so gave up these reluctantly. Then it came to his clothes, and besides the usual necessities, there were a few additions equally indispensable. If he took his fishing tackle he must take his fishing boots; no slight matter to begin with, for they were about as large as those that hang on either side of the commandant's horse

in the statue scene in *Don Giovanni*. If he took his boots, he must take the rest of his fisherman's get-up, and he had forgotten his gaff, and his bait can, and his net, and by the time he had added these to the articles already collected upon the floor, and glanced in despair at the small portmanteau, which he was determined should be his only encumbrance, and which would probably have held about a fifteenth part of what he had intended to take, he felt it necessary to have another pipe, and decide over it, not what he should like to take, but what he could not do without.

Considering his position in the seclusion of his studio, Mr. Francis decided not to take leave of Mary; at least to include her with the other servants, on whom he would generally bestow a nod and "good-bye," if he came upon them in a ruck, and nothing more. "She must think what she likes of me," he said, with a sigh; "she will think it hard, and perhaps be hurt, but I know I am acting rightly. Heaven knows what I might say if I saw that face so near to me again; I might break through my resolution." And still further to ensure his safety, he seldom entered the house except at meal-times; another course of action which Margaret, little knowing the cause, resented, and so nursed her jealousy as not

only to "keep it warm," but at boiling heat; ready, in fact, to explode on the very slightest excuse.

Between Mr. Candy Miles' meadow and a hayfield belonging to a neighbouring house ran a little lane sheltered on either side by high thick hedges. In the summer-time, it was one of the most picturesque little places that could be imagined, as it wound its way between the meadows, forming odd little nooks and corners, and, having a stile at every turning, it gave one constantly the impression of being at the end, only to be undeceived when the stile was mounted. Over these hedges all sorts of wild and beautiful flowers threw themselves in the richest luxuriance,—the honeysuckle making the summer air heavy with perfume, the graceful clinging convolvulus, the deadly nightshade so beautiful to the sight, all combined to make it constantly lovely. On the ground, nature had spread her softest carpet of emerald green, on whose border, growing in the shadow of the hedges, where flowers of all hues, shapes, and sizes; and on the bank of the tiny stream that ran under one hedge, and fell noisily over two stones into the broad trough that received it, until it in its turn flowed over, clustered primroses and violets in their season. Frank had often sketched portions of this lane; and the trough with the young oak

growing beside, and throwing its chequered shade upon it, and the tender green mosses covering the old gray stone, was a favourite spot of his.

The fourth night after he had determined to go away was Sunday, and he was wandering up and down the lane, noticing the clear outlines the prominent trees made across his path in the moonlight, and thinking, if he intended leaving at all, he had better be going at once.

Slight things have weight in deciding us, where there is a lack of graver ones, and he said Monday was a good day to start. Why should he not go to-morrow?

“Many men have begun things on a Monday, after the preceding day has been spent in thought and struggle. I will begin my work to-morrow; will make my first effort. For it is an effort; laugh at it as I will, and try to hide it from myself as I have done, it is still an effort. It will be a hard wrench, that will tear this infatuation from my heart—harder perhaps than I know myself yet. I feel *that* face will go with me, wherever I hide myself. I half doubt still whether I should not have been better cured if I had stayed at home, and seen the reality, than gone away to idealize it, as I probably shall. Perhaps I shall paint it again, and go mad over it, and come

back and claim the original. I think I am half mad already. Is it really the clear moonlight that is upon me, and are those trees, or gaunt phantoms? Am I really going away? and what am I going for? To leave all I love to the mercy of strangers, to leave her to believe me a cold, heartless libertine!"

He took up his place upon the stile he had reached, and rested his throbbing brow upon his hands. A thousand fevered fancies were chasing through his brain; then came the thought, "Perhaps I am going to be ill; how hot I am! how my pulse leaps! Perhaps I shall be delirious, and shout out all I feel in Margaret's hearing! God keep my brain clear!" He raised his face to let the breath of heaven fan away its fever, and saw coming along the path towards him, a female figure. It startled him at first, looking ghostlike in the moonlight, and then he knew it. It was Mary. It was fated they should meet, then, whatever he might determine. He never thought of going away, but braced up his energies to his work, and waited her coming. He was sitting in the shadow of a tall young tree that grew beside the stile, and she did not see him until she came within a yard or two. Then she stopped and hesitated,—

"Mary," said Frank, in a clear unbroken voice.

She came up, and stood at the stile, clasping the top rail with both hands.

"I am going away to-morrow, Mary, for a month or two, and had best bid you good-bye now. Good-bye, Mary," and he held out his hand. He had spoken quite quietly, but he felt the girl's hand tremble as it met his.

"Why are you going away, sir? I thought—that is, they said you were going to be married."

Mary's voice was very unsteady and uncertain.

"It will only delay my marriage a short time, Mary. It will take place when I come back."

"But why is it delayed? Why don't you marry Miss Hall, as you had intended before I came?"

Frank was silent: he could not tell her a lie; own the real reason he would not, and he was no adept at evasion. Presently he said,—

"I am only going away till I am more myself; I need a change, and I have many things to arrange first."

"Then you will marry her, after all?" sobbed poor Mary, exposing in that one dismayed sentence all the vain dreams and delusions of the last month.

"Yes," said Frank, firmly, and startled considerably by the exposure. "Why, my dear child, how could it be otherwise? She is almost my wife now ;

I am bound as much in honour to her as though she were. God forgive me if I have ever said a word that might be heard to her disparagement. She is a noble lady, and my life will not be ill-spent if I make her happy. Hush, Mary, see how still the night is. I think we shall have a storm, if extreme stillness presages a tempest. Nay, my dear, it is cruel to distress me so: we have each our trials; try and bear yours bravely, Mary. If our positions had been different, if I had not pledged my love and life elsewhere, I would never have said you must bear your trial unaided: but I am fettered; no act of mine must ever make me free, no act ever shall, and every word you speak is torture to me."

"And you will go away and leave me, and I shall never see you again. Oh, it is more than I can bear! Mr. Francis, marry Miss Hall, be very happy with her, but let me be your servant, let me sometimes hear you speak. Don't drive me from you; I shall die."

"Mary, Mary, you don't know what you ask?" cried Frank, madly; "our only safety is separation!"

"And you are going away that you may not see me; going away to forget me."

"Never to forget you, Mary. But I must go;

indeed, I must," and he looked upon her troubled face, with the childish tears on the long lashes. "Oh, Mary, hate me for my weakness; hate me that I have caused these tears."

"Are you unhappy too, sir?" she said, softly.

"I think I can never be anything else, Mary," he said, bitterly.

"Don't be unhappy for me, sir; it is my own fault. Go away, if you think it is best; only don't think of me with pain. You did care for me a little, sir?"

"Oh, Mary, have mercy on me. I see how heartlessly and thoughtlessly I have acted towards you. You teach me my duty; you give me new strength to go through what is right."

An expression of pleasure flitted across her face. She was so much a child that the pleasure of those kind words made her forgetful of the after time of pain and loneliness they entailed. He stood by her looking down upon her upturned face.

"You have forgiven me, Mary?"

"Yes."

He put down his lips to hers, and clasped his arms about her; for a moment they stood as though nothing might separate them again; and then as the church clock broke the perfect stillness of the

night with its measured strokes, he put her arms from him.

"God bless you, Mary! Good-bye," and he turned away with a stern resolve.

"Mr. Francis, I may see you again! you will come back," was the cry that followed him as he left her.

He turned once more.

"Never again, Mary; never again." And as she watched him go down in the moonlight, Mary felt it was, indeed, a final parting.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

## THE GREEN-EYED MONSTER.

A COLD, cheerless morning succeeded the bright moonlight evening, making the look out from Madapollam House windows a dreary one. All the valley below looked dark and drear. A keen, ruthless wind was rustling through the now scantily clad tree branches, making them moan and creak again as they stood out against the dull leaden-coloured sky, and hunting out the dry yellow leaves as they huddled themselves round the trunks, and scattered them broadcast over the desolate-looking lawn.

In the long room on the ground floor, Miss Miles sat at her framework, with the dull light falling on her light hair and thin, narrow face. Miss Miles was not handsome; even when elaborate head-dresses and costly gowns had done their share in her careful "get-up," hers was not a prepossessing physique. It required more than these to make one overlook the narrow, high forehead; light,

faintly marked brows, and high cheek-bones; the small gray eyes, that had a bright, cruel light in them at times, but were generally dull, and quite expressionless. She was always most careful in her dress, and now sat, as usual, stolid and calm, with every fold of drapery as it should be, every hair of her head straight and smooth, and her thin cold white hands plying their task with the regularity of machinery. There was one peculiarity about this lady, that she possessed that inestimable quality in a woman—as it is generally supposed to be—of never interfering with her neighbours' concerns. Tempests might rage, human passions struggle within a few yards of her, but she never raised her cold gray eyes from her occupation, unless she wanted something for herself. It was her boast that she went through life independent of everybody else, and wished everybody to do the same by her. If she thought a thing right, she did it, without considering any one else.

Mr. Francis sat in the bow window, reading. There was too little sympathy between them to induce any unnecessary conversation, so they were silent. Presently Miss Miles rang the bell.

“Send Mary Rueby in,” she said to the servant who answered the summons.

Mr. Francis looked up at his sister, but she was again intent upon her framework.

"What is the matter now?" thought he, but instantly became absorbed in his book the moment Mary appeared.

"I think, Mary," said Miss Miles, "that you have now been here three months."

"Yes, ma'am," said Mary, not venturing to move her eyes from her interlocutor.

Miss Miles took a small pile of money from the table beside her.

"There are the wages coming to you, including an extra month in absence of any previous notice. I wish you to quit the house as soon as you can to-day."

"Am I to leave?" cried Mary, aghast.

Miss Miles honoured her with a look of cold surprise, and then resumed her work.

"Yes. I have no further occasion for your services."

"Have I done anything wrong, ma'am? Have I displeased you in any way?" said poor Mary.

"No."

Mary saw there was no hope, and turned a look full of meaning upon Mr. Francis. It was lost, however, that gentleman being too intent on his

book to notice it, and Mary quitted the room. The moment the door closed he started up.

"What do you mean, Sarah, by this?" he demanded, angrily.

"Really, Frank, how you startle one! What do *you* mean?" said his sister.

"Mean! Is it possible, Sarah, that you can deprive a girl of her living one minute, and forget it the next?"

"If you allude to Mary, I have not deprived her of a living; she can easily get another place, and I will give her a character if you wish it. Really you talk as vehemently as my schoolmaster used, when he said I was bringing my father to an early grave, because I did not learn my French verbs."

Miss Miles stood in dread of her brother's tantrums, as she called them, and tried to ward off the one she saw pending; but Frank was in no mood for mirth.

"I want to know why you have dismissed Mary. Has she done anything wrong?"

"No, I think not. But I don't want her."

"You must want her as much as you did three months ago, Sarah. It is mere caprice; and, do you know, you have no right to do this—that, legally speaking, you cannot do it?"

Miss Miles stared. Was her brother mad? not do as she liked with a servant?

"Call Mary back, and retract what you have said."

"Indeed! Perhaps, Mr. Francis, you would like an apology as well?"

"If you dealt as one woman should to another, or even as a lady to a dependant, when that dependant is young and friendless, you would even do that."

"And, as it is, I shall neither do that, nor take her back. I say the girl shall go."

"Do you know how the girl was engaged? She was brought here in the security of a year's engagement, and you cannot break through that."

"Call her back, then, and let me say a few words to her—not an apology, though, Mr. Francis—and then offer her the option of remaining, and see whether she will break the engagement or not."

Frank paused. What could she mean by that? What could she have to say to the girl? Just then he heard Margaret's clear, fresh voice singing as she came along the hall, and presently saw her come in, gay and buoyant, with her broad leaf hat shading her face, and her shawl falling from her shoulders, with a carelessness that might have been studied grace, it was so charming. Her father was going

off to London that morning, and she had been down the road with him, and had come back up the lane, for in her hands she held a small bunch of autumn's last field flowers.

"Look, Frank, I've won my wager. You told me I should not find any flowers in the lane, and I knew so well where the last two or three grew that I could have found them in the dark, and nearly went last night in the moonlight to find them."

Frank could not help thinking, "Suppose she had!" and wondering, with the proverbial ill-luck with which he supposed himself honoured, what lucky chance had prevented it.

"Have I interrupted a conference?" asked Margaret, finding nobody spoke. "Pray resume, I'm going into the garden."

"No, not a conference, Margaret, but a quarrel," Miss Miles said. "Do not go, I want you to side with me. This valiant friend of yours has proved himself such a veritable champion of oppressed innocence, that he has quite conquered me by mere flow of eloquence."

"Indeed! And who is oppressed innocence personified by this time?" said Margaret, smiling. "One of our sex, I hope, for the sake of gallantry."

"Oh, yes, of course; my little waiting-maid, Mary Rueby," replied Miss Miles, with a malicious enjoyment of the pain she gave, of which only women are capable, and, I think, but a few of them.

Looking into Margaret's face as the name was spoken, Frank saw it flush deeply, and the lips press themselves together. Margaret was the very incarnation of jealousy, and the simple mention of Mary's name in connection with Frank's made her cheeks burn. But the sense of heartless injustice was too powerful in him just then to allow caution to have its proper weight, and with his usual impetuosity when he was excited, he rushed into the subject of discussion headforemost.

"I was disputing with my sister, Margaret, her right to dismiss a girl for a mere caprice," he said.

Margaret glanced meaningly at Miss Miles. Might be the subject was not so new to her as Frank supposed, for, in reply to the look, Miss Miles nodded and answered,—

"Yes, dear, I have done as I said."

"You probably, Miss Hall, knew something of this before? Well, can you reconcile such an act to your conscience?"

"I do not think it necessary to call upon my conscience in the matter," Margaret said, haughtily.

"If Sarah has no further use for the girl, I suppose there is no reason why she should keep her."

"Then you think my sister has a right to—to do as she has done?"

"Under the circumstances—yes."

"Under the circumstances! What do you mean, Margaret? Have you anything to say against the girl? Is she dishonest? No, I am sure she is not! By heavens! there seems to be a conspiracy against the girl."

"A conspiracy against a kitchen-maid! Really, Frank, you are too absurd."

They were alone now, Miss Miles having taken the opportunity of slipping out of the room, very much on the same principle that she might have left two vicious animals to "fight it out between them."

"Since you have taken it up, Margaret," Mr. Francis went on, more quietly, "I tell you I think Mary has been treated with far too little kindness and consideration since she has been under this roof. I think it should not have been forgotten that she was very young, and a total stranger to service altogether."

"Indeed, sir! You have probably inquired more closely into her personal history than I have; but, judging from my own observation, I saw nothing

particularly artless in the girl: indeed, the result she has effected proves her to be rather an adept than otherwise."

Margaret was speaking in her coldest, cruellest tones, and Frank winced under them like a patient under a surgeon's knife.

"Yes," he said, with a slight laugh, "she has certainly played her cards remarkably well; made you all her enemies, and lost her situation in three months."

"She has gained one friend that she probably saw would prove so valuable as to counteract the disadvantages of our prejudices."

"Who? Do you mean me, Margaret? Yes, I am likely to prove a very dear friend; but how? Can I find her another situation? I am afraid the extent of my friendship is a little useless championship, as Sarah calls it, and a sovereign."

"You can give her a character," replied Margaret, looking down superbly upon him; "you can go to some of your friends and say, 'Here is a girl of undeniable honesty, industry, and beauty,'—I know you are not so indifferent to that, Mr. Francis, as you pretended to be;—'she is virtuous and she is persecuted; she is good and unappreciated. At home my sisters, and—and my other friends, per-

secute her—drive her from their door. Take then this angel under thy roof, and it will be henceforward blest.’”

“I do say that to my dearest and nearest friends, and see how I am laughed at,” Frank said, with his face flushing; “poor Mary gets but little by my mediation. Come, Margaret, do not let us quarrel over this; and I am going away. Do me a personal favour, and ask Sarah to reconsider the verdict of this morning. She will do it for you.”

He lost his cause by making it a personal favour. What right had he to have any feeling in the matter? suggested jealousy.

“Your sister is at perfect liberty to act as she pleases in her own house, and I shall not interfere with her arrangements,” Margaret answered, frigidly.

“Not more than has been done already!” cried Frank, passionately. “Can you tell me, Miss Hall, that you had no hand in this matter? Forgive me if I speak harshly, but you knew something of this before this morning.”

“I did,” said Margaret, defiantly.

“It was you that wished her dismissed?”

“I felt that either Mary or myself must leave the house, sir. Your sister chose the former. If the selection pleases you so little, make it the other way,

"I am indifferent!" and Margaret gathered up her shawl, and retreated to the door.

"Here, stay—it is unnecessary, Miss Hall,—I am going myself."

"I suppose so," said Margaret.

"This is insufferable!" cried Mr. Francis, now alone, and marching up and down the long room, with a touch of his father's impetuosity and fire. "Here, this little girl gives up all she cares about, and all she loves, for the sake of Margaret, who repays her with persecution, and ultimately drives her from her home. By heaven! she is not worthy of the sacrifice I am making for her! I cannot see innocence and poverty trodden down in this heartless manner. She cannot care for me, or she would do as I wish; and I will not be her slave. I will not do wrong, and see wrong done, simply because it is by her hand. I will not."

## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE RESULT.

THE next morning found Mr. Candy Miles in his gallery ; he was suffering from a slight cold, and as the morning was wet he was not going down to the mill.

He had been studying yesterday's paper for some time past, when an idea suddenly struck him as to something he had forgotten, and he shouted for Rascals.

"Mr. Francis in ?" he asked, when the man appeared.

"No, sir."

"When did he go out ?"

"He hasn't been in since yesterday, sir."

"Did he take any luggage ?"

"One small portmanteau, sir."

"Very well. You may go."

"Yes, sir. If you please, there's some one from the mill wanting to see you."

"Send him in, then. Why didn't you tell me so before, and not wait till I called for you?"

"I did not think the man's time mattered, sir, for a second, and I was cleaning——"

"Your cleaning and you be damned! What do you know about the man's time? It's worth twice as much as yours, because he works, and you never do anything. Send him in."

"Yes, sir," and Rascals vanished.

"Wonder what's up at the mill now! if it was burnt down last night! There was a high wind, and I left before the lights were out. Well, Rueby, what brings you here? Want to see me?"

John Rueby came in slowly, and stopped to shut the door before he spoke. He wore his working clothes, and his face had a wild, distraught appearance.

"There's some'at happened, sir," he said, slowly, and coming up to the table with his hat and stick in his hand.

"I suppose so. Well, what is it? The mill all right?"

"Ay, that's all right, sir, for aught I know, for I ha' na' been there this hour or more."

"Not been at work, Rueby! Well, why not, have they offended you there?"

The master's manner to a "hand" was quite

different from what it was towards Rascals; he respected them as working men; men whose labour was their capital.

"I'm come here, Mr. Candy Miles, for some'at I left i' your charge."

The master eyed him keenly, without a suspicion of what he could mean.

"Look, master; if thee asked me t' leave my coat at thee house for thee t' wear, under promise o' gi'en me back agin when thee didna' want 't; if thee went an' lost this yer coat, or put 't i' th' fire, should na thee be responsible t' me for 't?"

"Of course I should, Rueby, and I'd buy you a new one for it," said the master, amused.

"Eh, but suppose a new un would na' pay me, suppose I loved th' coat, suppose I'd had th' coat these seventeen year or more, an' hoped t' ha' 't till I died. How 'ud thee pay me then?"

"I don't understand what you mean, my lad; I never had a coat of yours."

"No, sir; but thee'st had some'at that was more to me than ten coats; some'at thee took from my hearth, as innocent as a kitten, an' that I hold thee, master, responsible t' gi' me as thee took 't, wi'out spot or flaw," said John, impressively. "Master, I want my child!"

"Your child! Well, take her, and don't come and bully me," said Candy Miles.

"Where shall I find her, master?"

"Oh, I don't know! in the kitchen, I suppose. I'll ring for her."

"Stay, master, it is na' any good; she's na' i' th' house."

"Not in the house! Where is she, then?"

"That's jist what I came t' ask thee."

"How the devil should I know where the girl is!" said the master, wrathfully.

"I thought thee'd know where thee son was; an' 't 'ud be most th' same thing, I'm thinkin'."

On the eve of an indignant outburst, a recollection, until then utterly forgotten, flashed across the master's mind: the recollection of an unheeded warning of advice never taken or thought of twice.

"It's this I've got to tell thee, master," John went on, "that yesterday thee son took away my lass wi' him."

The master sat down a little stunned, and then drew a long heavy breath, and motioned John to go on.

"Yesterday mornin' thee daughter gi' my lass notice to quit, an' Mister Francis as was sittin' by quiet as a serpent watchin' spoke out for Mary agin his

sister, an' then t'other lady cam' in an' they had a regular flare up amongst themselves (so the cook ha' jist told me), an' then Mister Francis goes up for his carpet-bag, jist says a word t' Mary on th' stairs, an' goes off; an' a bit later Mary goes too, an' takes a little bundle wi' her, an' says her brother 'ud come for th' box arterwards. Now, sir, Mary niver come home, an' her an' Mr. Francis was seen wi' one another at th' railway station arter that, an' was watched in th' railway train; so it be clear to me, it's thee son that 'a done this yer bad turn, an' not a body beside."

"On my soul, Rueby, I knew nothing of this," the old man said; "I didn't even know Mary was leaving."

"I believes thee, master, no more than I did last night; but first thin' this mornin' when I got t' th' mill, I heard the people pointin' an' whisperin', an' then my lass Esther comes up t' me, wi' her face all white, an' a shakin' so she co' scarce stan' up. 'Father,' says she, 'they're all talkin' about our Mary; jist thee heed what they're sayin'; I can't. They ha' to'd me some'at about her an' th' master's son, but I can't understand 'em, an' they won't speak plain.' She's a strong lass is Esther, but this overcome her, an' she fell down at my feet i' a faint, an' there they to'd me,

one or other o' em, bit by bit,—for they knew I sho'n't take it over quiet—an' one o' em laughed when I went about ravin' and mad t' think of what had happened, an' swearin' I'd ha' his blood; this un said it 'ud be a fine thing for th' girl, an' 'ud take a pretty penny t' hush it up, an' I made a blow at th' fellow that made him howl, an' 'ud ha' begun this awful day by punchin' all th' life out o' his lyin' body, but they kept me back, an' I'm come up here."

Perhaps while John was speaking, the master was not listening; he accepted the fact as only too true, and did not need explanations. He was thinking of his friend Hall, of Margaret, of many plans that this would throw over, and when roused to a recollection of the present, by the emphatic gestures with which John finished his long speech, his sole thought was an irritating wish to be alone.

"I am very sorry for you, Rueby; but go away now, my lad; you are too excited to listen to reason now; and in a day or two I'll come and talk with you, and we'll see what can be done," said the master.

"When there's on'y one thing as can be done," replied John, doggedly, "I don't see what need there's talkin' over 't."

"They are many things that can be done, when

you are cool enough to hear them ; but it's no good now, my lad, and you'd better go home."

"I tell thee, master, there's on'y one thing as can be done, an' that shall be done too," repeated John.

"And what's that?" asked Mr. Miles, with a touch of his usual fire.

"That he shall marry her!"

"Marry her!" screamed Candy Miles, showing that whatever he might have meant "to talk about," *that* was not the recompence intended.

"Ay! an' why not?"

"Why not! My son marry your girl!"

"Ay."

"Marry a girl out of the kitchen! Marry a girl who would be a disgrace to him as long as he lived!"

"I don't know that, sir; perhaps he's done so already."

John Rueby had only spoken out a passing thought; but it stilled the master's wrath like a touch of magic. Good God! suppose he had, and it seemed as likely as not. He thought of Frank's impetuosity, his mad impulses, his recklessness, and it fell on him with the weight almost of a conviction. His son married to a kitchen-maid! all those years

of education thrown away, himself lost to society for evermore; he thought he would rather have heard he was dead.

He leant back, wiping the cold sweat from his brow, and then turned upon his companion with such a firm determination conveyed in his face and manner, that what he was going to say might have been recorded on tablets of brass, for all he meant to swerve from the resolutions therein conveyed.

“If my lad’s done as you say, or if, by any persuasion or threatening from you or from anybody else, he should do it, I disown him; the moment he calls that girl his wife, the moment he ties himself to you and your family, he becomes one of you, and shares your poverty. I shall no longer have a son, and so much rather than its being a fine thing for your girl to have caught my son, she’d better have bestowed herself on the poorest hand in my mill. Frank was bred to be a gentleman; as a poor man he would be at a loss where to turn for bread and cheese: he cannot work; he hasn’t a shilling but what comes out of my pocket, and never had. He owes several debts, nothing to him in his right position, but sufficient to cause him a good deal of inconvenience if he has no money to pay them with. He was over age when he

contracted them, and is alone responsible for them. From me, in such a case, he should never have a penny to save his wife from starvation, and himself from a prison. Look at the case fairly; she is not marrying a rich man's son, but a man who can offer her no home to cover her head."

"Ay, master, that be all very well, but thee co' na' do 't; thee co'n't see thee son starvin', an' thee rollin' in money. Thee daughters co' na' ride out i' th' carriage, an' see their own blood brother i' rags; it ain't human, sir. Maybe Mister Frank 'ud ha' to gi' up a good bit o' what he may ha' thought was comin' t' him. But thee must gi' him a little out o' thee plenty, an' we're plain folks, an' what's little t' thee, sir, 's a mighty sight more t' us."

"I suppose a halfpenny's the same to us, John, rich or poor; and I tell you again he shouldn't have that to save his life; and if my daughters gave him anything they should go too. Don't mistake me: when I mean a thing, I mean it, and when I say a thing, I do it!"

He looked so thoroughly as though he did both mean it, and would do it, that John Rueby paused and drew a long breath. It was very clear, among all his vehemence, that he had considered the pre-

bable alliance of Mary with a wealthy man's son as a thing not to be despised, and was put out of his calculations by this cool statement. The master saw his triumph, and had a quiet smile to think how all this blustering of a father's love had settled down into a mere calculation of money at last.

"Don't think I shall alter my mind," he said, following up this advantage; "don't think because he is my son, that I could not bear to see him degraded. I tell you the nearer he is to me, the more I should hate him, if he disobeyed me. I should like to see him brought low; brought to the level of the girl he has taken with him. I shall write to him, and tell him what I tell you. I won't see him till he has given me his word one way or another; and if he sides with you, he shall have his choice in black and white to look at in his poverty, and say, 'I brought it on myself.' Come, Rueby, my lad, leave this to me; we shall know more about it in a day or two, and be working less in the dark."

"An' what am I t' say i' that day o' two, master, t' th' wife an' Esther; it's hard bein' i' suspense, sir, an' not knowin' where th' lass may be."

"No good will be done by violence, and I don't know where the girl is, any more than you do. My

son went away without my knowing; whether he went alone or not. But keep away from the mill, till I know something more, and I'll send Farrel down to you."

"Ay, master, thee needn't fear I'll go t' thee mill, nor Esther, nor any o' 'em again," John replied; "it were a black day for us all when we cam' across you an' the mill floor."

The master motioned him with his hand to be gone.

"Don't stop now, Rueby," he said, "but remember, what I've told you I mean—I mean!"

He turned repeating it, as John went slowly out, still muttering vengeance: and then, when alone, drew his chair up to the fire, to meditate on his spoilt plans.

"The lad's a fool," he said,—“a fool, to be lured away by a pretty face. He's had too easy a life, and if he comes back, we'll alter that, and he shall rough it a bit. He shall know what uphill work it is to get a position, and then perhaps he'll not be so fast at throwing it away again. I suppose he thinks because he's clever he can always make his way; what many a fellow thinks, and doesn't see it's because he has got money at his back, not for having brains in his head, that people

bow to him. See how they'd look if the money went; why, they'd forget the brains were still there. I wonder how the poor lass upstairs will take it; and there'll be a devil of a row with Jim. The lad's a fool, a fool."

It is to be lamented, but is no less remarkable, that in all his cogitations as to the consequences attendant on this sad event, it never occurred to the master to bestow one thought of pity on the poor deluded girl, who, it would certainly seem, deserved the most commiseration; but the fact is, he had his own ideas on such subjects, and, on the whole, thought the Rueby family had worked things cleverly, and if they had not had a great general like himself to oppose them, would most probably have made a good *coup*.

Such is the estimate of virtue in some minds; but, although the master was determined to spoil the little plot, he felt no particular enmity against the plotters; nay, since he was so certain of winning, he smiled to think of the battle beforehand.

## CHAPTER XX.

### AN APPOINTMENT.

QUOTING John Rueby, "when Mr. Francis ran upstairs, an' jist spoke a word to Mary on th' stairs," he put a bit of paper in her hand, and was gone.

His "word" had been, "Mary, where are you going?" and her reply, "I don't know; I daren't go home: father would beat me for losing my place. God help me!" And after watching him go, she stole up despairingly to her own little room and, kneeling at the window, opened the slip of paper, and read, "Meet me by half-past two at the railway station. Don't fail me."

There was nothing more, no word of endearment, no promise of love; but it bid her come to him, and that was enough. Mary laid her head upon the morsel of paper, and cried a rain of grateful tears upon it. A moment since, and she had thought him gone, had thought he was leaving her in her trouble without a care or thought,

and all the while he had been thinking of her, planning for her. God bless him! I vow there was no other thought in her heart but blind gratitude; she never questioned what could come of meeting him, what motive he could have in making that appointment.

Events had followed each other too quickly to allow her time to pause or think. Last night he had bidden her good-bye for ever, and this morning he said, "Come to me." She had no settled purpose one way or the other. She meant to do right, but she was not very clear which was wrong, and, all unsettled and uncertain, she was dependent upon the tidal of others' thoughts and actions, and was borne down the stream to good or evil, passively.

When a fragile bark is tossed to and fro on a troubled ocean, when every fresh billow changes its course and threatens to overwhelm it, when darkness is upon the mariner and he knows not whither to turn, is he very particular into what haven chance may direct him? Because it is not exactly the port he would have chosen on a calm sea, and with the helm all willing in his directing hand, will he cast himself into the raging storm again, and dare the anger of the elements for a scruple as to the cleanliness of his haven? Mary's love was her bark: first the waters

had shown themselves treacherously fair ; then, torn by contending emotions, there fell the sombre apparent calm of despair ; then other emotions rose, and poured their anger on the little craft, and the mariner threw up the helm, and cried, "I cannot guide thee ; bear me as thou wilt !" and it passed the gulf of despair, and fell into a gently running streamlet, where, if evil lingered, it wore a lovely guise.

Love has moved the strongest of God's creatures to strange things. Mary was one of his weakest, and she loved tenderly. That appointment was to her the sunshine of hope breaking through the dense clouds of despair that had gathered round her, and she could not hide her face from it as a temptation. She turned to it and let the glad light pour down into her grateful heart. He bid her come, and Mary could not disobey ; he was her haven from the surging sea of trouble around her, and she clung to him : ah ! how confidingly and tenderly.

Under its influence with what different feelings she made herself ready to go, and went down to bid her fellow-servants good-bye : her heart misgave her a little when she turned the handle of the door where she expected to find Miss Miles, and to whom, as was customary, she was going to drop a curtsey and say good-morning.

There was only one lady in the room, and that was not Miss Miles; how Mary wished it had been.

"Good-morning, Miss Hall; I'm going," Mary said, half in the room and half out.

Margaret turned her head; she had not been up to dress since the morning, and her hair fell in thick unbound curls on her neck. Mary saw the stains of tears upon her face.

"Come here, Mary: I will not keep you long; I want to speak to you," she said, gently.

Mary went up reluctantly, very reluctantly, and Margaret laid her hand on the girl's shoulder.

"Perhaps when I have been here, I have not been very kind to you, Mary," Miss Hall said. "I am often hasty when I do not mean it. I will not offer you money, but you seemed grieved this morning at losing your situation. Will you come to my home? I have only one other sister, who is much younger than myself, my mother is very gentle and kind, and you would find the place light. Come, Mary, accept it; I dare say it is a trouble on your mind to go home now and say you have been dismissed. If you accept my offer, you will only have changed Miss Miles' service for mine."

Mary's heart beat violently; she would rather

Margaret had struck her than laid that gentle hand on her shoulder, and spoken kindly.

"I am much obliged to you, Miss Hall, and will think of what you say, if—if I go into service again."

"Better there than in a factory. Well, good-bye: tell your mother what I wish; she may, perhaps, think better of it than you do."

"Yes, miss," Mary said, and quitted the room.

"I wonder if Frank is gone; gone away thinking me unreasonable and unjust," Margaret mused, sadly, and brushing away the fresh tears as they started. "Shall I write and tell him how sorry I am? No, no; if he loves me he'll come back, and I—I can tell him better, much better than writing; and it will be a lesson to me!"

## CHAPTER XXI.

## BAD NEWS.

ALL that day Margaret waited, hoping. Frank must come back; he would get over his temper, as she had done hers, and they would be friends again, before her father returned.

The next day, when John Rueby brought the news, it was whispered in the kitchen long before it reached the parlour, and then all the household, from servant to mistress, combined to keep it from *her*. From sheer pity they kept it from her all that first day; gave evasive replies to anxious questions, and hushed incautious words; and when it became necessary to tell her, they dreaded the consequences, and none liked the office. The bolt quivered a moment in the air, and the victim smiled unconsciously; then it fell. They may have expected screams, hysterics, mad despair, total prostration; but they got none of these. When the blow fell, Margaret reeled back once, deadly white, and then, recovering herself,

listened to what little they could tell her, almost with a smile upon her face. But watching her after, still stealthily seeking to find some bodily ailment to mark the agony of the mind, they saw a deep crimson spot on each cheek, and marked that expression of continual pain upon her face that subsequent trouble stamped on it still more deeply, and that lingered there for many years after.

The Misses Miles had never been confidantes of Margaret, and could not be so now; where there was so little apparent distress, consolation seemed out of place; besides, the cause of the trouble being their brother, made their position awkward. So they lisped out a few regrets, and went off to their embroidery, leaving Margaret alone, sitting at the drawing-room fire with a book on her knee.

Here an old servant of the house, coming in timidly with a proffer of wine, found her, and suddenly breaking out into a torrent of rude tenderness, which the Misses Miles' polite sympathy sadly lacked, came and knelt down by the lonely girl, and chafed her cold hands.

"Oh, miss, try to cry; don't look so awful, only try to cry."

And Margaret wakened from her half trance, and turned to look upon the honest, tear-stained face.

"Oh, miss, I know it's dreadful, indeed I do; but try to bear up. Just think of your father, miss, and how it 'ull vex him to see you ill!"

"Yes, Jane, yes: I have still my—my father," and the girl's head fell upon her humble friend's shoulder, with a burst of tears.

Mr. Candy Miles, anticipative of great distress, never intruded on the family circle all that day, and shut himself up in his gallery that he might not meet her, and was, certainly, a little surprised to hear through Rascals, that Miss Hall had taken her place at the dinner-table, as usual, with his daughters. He had no belief in women's firmness; he looked upon tears as their birthright, and expected a plentiful flow on every occasion; and when, in the evening, Margaret came into his gallery for *The Times*, if Mr. Miles were not using it, that gentleman was a little discomposed. She came up to the hearth where he sat, and stood opposite, with her arm upon the broad marble chimney-piece, looking tranquil and placid, as usual; and there sprang up in the master's mind a large amount of involuntary respect for her.

"You expect your father here to-night, do you not, my dear?" he said.

"Yes; I came to ask you by what train he would be likely to come, sir."

Candy Miles took out his watch.

"There is one at half past-seven; it is twenty minutes past now. I should think he would come by that."

Margaret thought so too.

"I wish he would come by an earlier one," she said, presently; "he is not well, and has no right to be out in these fogs at night."

Margaret took a turn round the gallery, and studied the pictures; the master watched her, still speculating. Perhaps Margaret knew she was watched; there was mischief and pride enough in her composition for her to assume exactly the opposite demeanour to that which she was expected to bear; and all that day may have been mere acting.

Candy Miles must have thought of this: "But, by Jove, I'd no idea a daughter of James Hall could bear up so well; she's a brave girl, and Frank is more a fool than ever."

While Margaret was still there Rascals came in, saying some one wished to see Miss Hall.

Margaret started. "May I see him here, Mr. Miles?" she asked, hurriedly.

"Show him in, Rascals," said the master.

The new-comer was an old servant of Mr. Hall's, and Margaret went up anxiously to him.

"Why, Robert! what is the matter? Is my mother ill?"

"No, miss; she's very well. But I came to tell you your father's come home," the man said.

"Come home, and not called for me! Why, he promised to come round for me," and Margaret's lip quivered like a child going to cry; perhaps she had borne her *quantum* of trouble that day, and, like the last feather in the load, this slight vexation threatened to break down the whole.

"He wasn't well, miss," said Robert, hesitatingly, and looking over at the master, "and came straight home. So I've come for you, miss."

"Not well! It is nothing worse? He is not dangerously ill?"

The man looked at her, and then turned away his face.

"He—he isn't at all well; don't ask me what's the matter; don't lose time; come home at once; better be at home!"

Margaret's face blanched; she turned sick from sheer terror, and came and laid her hands on his arm.

"He is at home? You are telling me right? I shall see him if I come?"

"Yes, Miss Margaret, yes."

Margaret waited to hear no more, but ran upstairs.

"Have a drop of wine, Robert?" said Mr. Miles.  
"There has nothing worse happened?"

The old servant bowed his head upon his hand.

"I couldn't tell her, sir," he broke out; "I came to, but I couldn't. Mr. Hall is dead, sir."

"Good God!" screamed the master, and then he staggered back with his face quite white.

"It's true, sir; he came home by the five train to-night, and took a cab from the station home; he was mortal bad when I helped him, and I laid him on the drawing-room sofa, and there he died soon after. Oh, sir! isn't it dreadful?"

"It is, indeed," echoed the master.

"They say it was in consequence of some great shock, but I couldn't learn what. I left the missis in hysterics, and said I'd come for Miss Margaret, for the others said they couldn't bear to tell her, and now I'm as bad——"

He stopped short, for Margaret came in quickly; she had been away scarcely two minutes, yet had wished the Misses Miles good-night and was ready to go.

She shook hands with the master, and then, seeing Robert did not move, asked the reason. The man looked at the master, asking by his face that he would tell her, but Mr. Candy Miles turned away.

"When she gets home, Robert; not now, not now," he said. And they went out into the hall, the master following. He watched them get in, and wrapped Margaret's cloak more closely round her; and then, as they drove away, after hearing Margaret bid the driver in her quick imperious way to drive in great haste, he went back into his gallery.

"God help the poor lass when she knows it!" he said, with his own voice trembling.

Half an hour later Mr. Benjamin Wills was announced. He found the master bending over the fire with his face upon his hands.

"I've just come from town by the seven train," he said; "and as there is something afloat I thought I'd come round and tell you: a mile or so makes no difference to Benjamin Wills, sir, when he can do a service."

"What have you come to tell me?"

"About poor James Hall."

"I—I have heard already," said the master, turning away.

"The devil you have! Well, it was all over London when I left. I don't know how he'll get over it."

"Get over it! What foolery you are talking,

Wills?" asked the master, starting up impatiently.  
"How should he get over it?"

"Well, it is enough to strike down any man. It would try even me, being so sudden."

The master looked at Mr. Wills with irritable surprise and wonderment, and then fell to walking up and down.

"Did he come round and tell you about it?" pursued Mr. Wills, quite unconsciously.

The master turned upon him savagely; he could not bear joking on the subject of death.

"Go out of my gallery!" he cried. "Go out of my house! and never let me see your face again, till you can speak in a proper manner about such things!"

Mr. Wills was aghast. What had he said or done to merit this outbreak? "The master must be very deeply in, too," thought he.

"How dare you come here," said the master, "and mock and laugh while the poor fellow lies dead on his bed?"

"Dead! Great Heaven! Miles, what do you mean?"

"What do I mean? Didn't you know it? Wasn't it this you came to tell me, and to joke and jeer about?"

"No, Miles; on my soul, I knew nothing of it before!"

"What was it you came to tell me, then?" asked the master, considerably cooled.

"I came to tell you that Mr. Hall had entrusted the whole of his property to that damned thief Alfred Pilliger, who was found this morning to have decamped with the whole of the proceeds!"

Worse and worse. The master sat down in sheer despair. This, then, was the cause of Mr. Hall's illness and death. Ruin had stared him in the face, and the blow had killed him.

Both were silent for a time, and then, "Tell me all about it, Wills," the master said, speaking in a hoarse, low tone.

"You know, sir, that Pilliger was always talking about the splendid investments he could make if he had a little money. Begad! he tried it on with me, but I wasn't quite so green. Poor Hall, it seems, was won over by some representations of his, and gradually, from time to time, advanced all the cash he had available. This must have been going on for some time under our very noses. Well, a month ago—or it may be still farther back—Pilliger comes to him, tells him the speculation is worth double what he thought it was, but that it

requires more money to complete it; and Hall, by his persuasion—he was the very devil at figures and making things show double—realizes all his landed property, and—by God! it makes me mad to think of his childishness—placed the whole of the result in Pilliger's hands! After that, being anxious, I suppose, especially since Pilliger was sold up and left Prestwich, he was pretty constantly in London looking after him; but, having been away two days, he arrived last night to find the bird flown, and nothing but a desk, a stool, and a geological map left to represent the invested capital. By George! it is the most complete swindle I ever heard of in my life!"

## CHAPTER XXII.

## A CHANCE LOST.

THE fire flickered low in Mrs. Rueby's kitchen. It was the only light there, and threw a fitful alternation of light and shade upon everything. Outside it was growing dusk, and a cold cheerless wind swept across the waste ground opposite.

Esther was sitting on a low stool at the fire, warming little Tops, whom she was nursing. Mrs. Rueby held the other child on her lap fast asleep, and was dropping silent tears upon it. She had been talking by fits and starts, bemoaning her lot, and now, as she remained perfectly quiet, Esther thought she must be dozing.

It was almost the first time poor Esther had had to think quietly over their trouble; to begin with, it had stunned her, and she had listened to consolations and condolences impatiently, as in a dream; but it had gradually all through the last two active days been gathering strength and weight, and now

the grief and shame fell on her. Almost for the first time she fully realized what had happened. Could Mary have come in then repentant, it might have been Esther herself who would have cast her forth again. She had loved her dearly, but she said she would put her from her now, and forget her. In Esther, lowly born, and with only her own rigid sense of right and wrong to direct her, there was much of the stern, immovable faith of the old Puritans, much of that pride that makes virtue and honesty defy temptation, and the present humiliation and shame seemed to her doubly keen. And as though to aggravate her unhappiness, their neighbours thought it was no such bad thing for a girl; morality lay very low among the "hands," and "there was no knowing how handsomely things might be done," they said, making Esther clench her hands, and hide her face. And then fell that hardness over her heart, and Mary was included in the bitter curse she laid upon Frank. She thought Mary's weakness and selfishness as culpable as his deliberate villany, her forgetfulness of her mother and her home, her deceit towards herself. Innocent, Esther would have died for her; but guilty, she could have stood on the threshold, and spurned the crouching girl from before her.

There was a gentle tap at the door, and Esther, lifting Tops on her arm, went to open it. It was Gilbert Farrel.

"Good evening, Esther. No, thank you, I won't come in," he said; "I've been round to see your brother, and thought I'd best come to tell you he's getting on very well. The doctors say he can come out in a day or two."

"Thank you for going, Mr. Farrel. I thought the poor lad would think himself neglected; but I had not time to go round myself."

"He is well attended to, and wants nothing," Gilbert said, and, taking from his pocket a little parcel of money, he laid it in Esther's hand.

"What is this?" she asked, shrinking back instinctively.

"Robert's wages."

"He has received much more already than was coming to him on the day of his accident," replied Esther.

"It is the custom in the master's mill, if a hand is not connected with any of the sick societies, to continue his wages for some weeks after an accident."

"I cannot take Mr. Miles's money."

"You have no right to refuse what Robert has earned as thoroughly by his good conduct and

industry, as if he were working there still. Come, Esther, take it."

But she held back still.

"You would have taken it three days ago," Gilbert said.

"Yes."

"Take it now, then. And if you will listen to me, you will come back to the mill. You have no friends here."

"None, but those who are poorer than ourselves, if that can be," said Esther.

"And yet you refuse this money."

"I would refuse it, if it were the last thing between me and starvation," Esther answered, proudly. "I will never touch Mr. Miles's money again. I will never come back to his mill. I came to that determination yesterday, and got some sewing from a shop, till I can get into another mill. If you want to do me a real service, Mr. Farrel, don't offer me money that it would burn my hand to take, but find me another place to work at."

"You will find none so kind as ours, Esther; some of these millowners are mere brutes, and you'd better think twice before you give it up."

"It wants no second thought."

Gilbert leant against the door-frame, whistling,

as he always did when he was puzzled. The street was nearly dark, and quite quiet, and the wind blew coldly. Beyond, gleamed the lamps on the railway arch, and Gilbert noticed a solitary female figure come across the waste ground, picking her way among the heaps of dust and rubbish laid down. She came hurriedly, and, getting into the street, passed him with her head bent down, and was presently lost in the shadow of the houses. Esther had been soothing Tops, who was half asleep, and crying peevishly, and Gilbert turned to her.

"I know how you feel, Esther, and think perhaps you are right; though it goes against the grain to say so, if I had a sister, I should wish her to think as you do. But you have no right to refuse money for these little ones, and sewing is a bad trade. Many a woman has set out with that notion, and fancied while she could use her fingers she had no need of help. But it always fails; shopkeepers are thieves, and will let you starve over their work. I'll look out for you, as you wish, and in the meantime, Esther, let me lend you some trifle—something, I mean, that you can pay back when you are all at work again and straight, and you won't feel the loss of."

"You are very kind, very kind, when everybody seems turned against us," faltered Esther, "and when I want—if at any time we should need it so much—I will come to you."

"But now, Esther—take it now."

"No, no, not now; I do not want it just now, indeed I do not. I had saved a few shillings, we were getting on so well, and they come in now."

"As you will, Esther, but I am not going to leave you, though you seem determined to cut me," said Gilbert, cheerfully. "I shall see you to-morrow night, and shall remember your promise that I am to be the first you will come to. Good-night."

He held out his hand, and stood for a moment irresolute. Esther could not take it, because both hers were occupied with Tops, who had fallen asleep on her shoulder.

"No, there is nothing more, I think; good-night," he said, a second time.

"Good-night, Mr. Farrel," Esther replied, and, as he turned down the street, she stood watching him.

Quiet, self-possessed, Esther was touched. In all their trouble, this one friend seemed doubly

dear. He was far higher than they in station, and yet was not ashamed to know them, and, instead of shunning them now, only seemed to come closer.

"I knew he was a good, true man, ever since I heard him speak so kindly of his mother," Esther mused, softly, to herself; "he's a true man, that's a good son."

She went back into the kitchen. Mrs. Rueby wakened up as she came in.

"Where ha' thee bin gaddin' to, wi' th' poor child i' th' cold," she said, peevishly.

"I haven't been anywhere, mother; I've been at the door talking to Mr. Farrel: he came to tell us Robert was getting on very well, and may be out in a day or two."

"Ah, poor lad, poor lad, it's a sorry comin' out for him; he'd better by a good bit stop where he is: there won't be ony home for him t' com' to i' a bit, save the workhouse," sobbed the poor woman.

A few minutes later, John Rueby came in from the public-house, where for the last day or two he had spent the greater part of his time.

"Here, missus, I want sixpence; I've no more money, an' I jist 'ud like t' git back an' ha' another gill. Th' chaps are waitin'."

"I ain't got any money, John, an' thee knows that," his wife replied; "Esther's got 't all now."

"Come, Esther, my lass, gi' thee father a little; he's gi'n thee lots afore now, when things was different. I know thee's got some, for th' chaps down there see'd Master Farrel come up here, an' he'd come for nought than t' leave money for thee, so thee may spare me some."

"He did not leave any, father," said Esther, quietly, but not without some trepidation, for John was very violent at times.

"Then he's robbin' us," he broke out, "an' he's a damned thief, for he says when my poor Bob was hurt, says he, 'he'll ha' his wage jist as if he was workin' for a bit.'"

"But, father, you would not take it; you said I should not go to work, and earn Mr. Miles's money, so we can't take his charity."

John Rueby stopped short to consider the question. He had left the door open when he came in, and the same figure Gilbert had watched coming across the waste land stood half concealed there, listening. When the inmates of the kitchen were busied in talking, she ventured to peep in, but when they ceased, she crouched down under the wall.

"Thee be'st right, lass," John said. "Curse her !

She a' took th' bread out o' her poor father's mouth."

"Hush, father!" entreated Esther.

"An' why? Why mayn't I curse her? Do thee women, wi' thee softness, an' thee foolery, go an' pity her, an' take her back. I tell thee, if I found her nigh my fireside agin, I'd strike her down as she stood."

The figure at the door shrank back, with her shawl before her face.

"You needn't fear, father," said Esther. "Mary will not come back."

"How dost thee know that?" put in Mrs. Rueby. "I dreamt last night she did. I see'd her come an' stand by th' bedside, as 't might be, and speak t' me. I tell thee, when them as go away, an' gits int' trouble, an' them as they ha' trusted deceive 'em—as they al'ays do—they turn back, an' think o' th' home they ha' left, an' come, maybe, li' a lamb t' its mother for shelter an' comfort. I dreamt last night we was i' th' old place agin, and Mary was come back. Oh! John, man, don't be hard on her; don't say I shall niver see my lass agin, an' thee'll niver forgi' her!"

Esther stood back; if she could not forgive, if she could listen unmoved to the poor broken-down

mother pleading for her child, surely it could not touch John Rueby. Father and daughter, each so different, and yet feeling so alike on this subject, representing in themselves the working power of the family, of one accord shut their hearts against the strayed one; Esther silently and steadily, John not so silently, but still sternly; and he stood up now on his own hearth, and, in his rough fashion, cursed her again.

“No, John, no! i’ God’s mercy, no! Think o’ her a little child, and how we loved her! Think how she may come tremblin’ an’ full o’ fear t’ her father’s door for shelter, when a’ th’ world be cryin’ shame o’ her. I ha’ bin a good wife t’ thee, John, but I canna do this. An’ if my child comes t’ me, an’ says, ‘Mother, I ha’ sinned,’ I canna send her forth agin; it’s na i’ her mother’s heart t’ cast her out!”

Oh! the figure at the door, crouching to the earth, stifling her sobs, looking into the little firelit kitchen, with the black bare waste behind her all dark and silent. Oh, Esther! so good, so strong, and so pitiless; think how little virtue avails if it does not walk hand in hand with charity. We may all some day need compassion; may all, some day, be humbled. Give one kind word for the repentant

sinner, and she will be among you ; be saved from what none but your hand can rescue her. But the kind word never came.

"She forgot us, mother ; she left us in our poverty. We worked for her, and this is our return," said Esther, cruelly.

"An' thee, too, Esther, are agin her, li' all th' rest ; an' I thought thee loved her !"

"So I did, mother."

"An' now, because she's down, thee won't stretch out a hand t' save her. Well, maybe she won't want it, an' I shall niver see her agin ; an' then thee own hardness 'll fall on thee, Esther. Oh, my child ! my child !"

She turned from the hearth, and went feebly upstairs, sobbing as she went.

John was sitting with his elbows on his knees, looking into the fire.

"You will not go out again to-night, father?" said Esther, as she put things straight about the kitchen, and lit the candle to sew by.

"No, my lass."

Esther shut the door. Ah ! that simple act, how much it unconsciously implied, and influenced. They shut her out ! The woman outside rose and went over the black waste. Friendless and homeless she

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went her way, huddling her shawl round her, and with the cold wind tangling her loosened hair, and blowing it across her face wet with tears. So she went till she reached the dark arches, and there turned to look once more at *home*, ere she was lost in the deep shadow they cast.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

## EXPLANATIONS.

It was nearly eight o'clock, and Gilbert Farrel was at his lodgings. He sat with his books pushed aside, and his newspaper lying, unopened, on the rug. Perhaps, except those very nearly interested in it, the affair of the last eight days had touched none more deeply than Gilbert. The deception of the young master, whom he had always looked upon as too generous and too good to be capable of such meanness, whom he had so honoured and so loved, hurt him deeply.

"It seems hard it should have been he," he said, mournfully, "who always seemed to me better and cleverer than most men, and was proud he was not ashamed of being friendly with me, and liked me better than companions in his own station."

As he sat thinking, regretfully, he heard the front door open, and slow halting steps coming up the stairs.

"Thank you, I know his room," said a voice.

Gilbert must have recognized it had it not been so hoarse and low. The door opened, and a gentleman, heavily cloaked, came in; he turned to shut the door, and then stood face to face with Gilbert.

"Good Heaven! Mr. Francis!"

The visitor nodded, and, throwing aside his hat, took his usual seat at the fire.

A chill came over Gilbert as he looked at him; he knew the face, but it was so altered. So ghastly white, so shrunken, so utterly bereft of the look of boyish gaiety which had constituted its chief charm, that years might have passed since Gilbert had last seen it, and yet the change would have startled him. His heart melted towards him as he looked.

"You have been ill, sir?" he asked.

"I have, Gilbert. I think if my purpose for coming here had been less strong than it is, I should never have left my bed again!"

He put up a thin, wasted hand to wipe the clammy sweat that stood in big beads on his white face.

"I am so weak—walking upstairs was a—a great effort," he said, faintly. "Get me some brandy-and-water, Gilbert; it is the only thing that keeps life in me."

He shivered closer to the fire, and Gilbert went

to get what he wanted. When he brought it, which he did, with sundry misgivings as to its being a good remedy, Mr. Francis took a deep draught, saying it did him good.

"Now then, tell me what has gone on since I left. How's my father?"

"Not very well, sir. Doesn't seem half himself at times," replied Gilbert, with some hesitation, for he did not know how his visitor would hear the details of the trouble he himself had occasioned.

"Ah! I suppose you all think I am very wicked; well, perhaps I am, but not as you see it. And how do my dear sisters take my behaviour?" he said, lightly. "Have they gone in mourning? By Jove, it was a near touch, for me, that they didn't have to do it in earnest?"

"I have not seen them since," Gilbert said, sternly. "But there is some one else to think of first."

Frank's face fell.

"You mean Margaret," he answered, with a groan.

"God help her!" Gilbert said, solemnly.

"Why? She is not—oh, no, she never loved me enough for that——"

"Two days after she lost you, her father died."

"My God!"

"And he died a bankrupt!"

Frank sprang from his chair.

"No, Gilbert! In God's name, don't tell me that," he cried.

"It is true."

Frank fell back exhausted and stricken, breathing so heavily that each respiration was like a sob. Gilbert, frightened at his own work, leant over him fearfully, and, steeping a handkerchief in the cold water, laid it across his brow. Frank did not heed, but, recovering himself with a gasp from the momentary unconsciousness, he leant back with closed eyes, thinking bitterly of himself.

"Where is—is she, Gilbert?" he asked presently. "At my father's?" Perhaps with the thought that he would go and humble himself before her.

"No, she went home."

"And this," thought Frank, "is the end of all my noble aspirations, and all my philosophy: to have deceived every one who ever loved me. There is fatality in it," he said.

At length he drew himself up, and brought back his mind to the purport of his visit.

"When did—Mary come home?"

"Come home! She has never come home. No one has seen her since——" Gilbert hesitated.

"Well, since when?" said Frank, impatiently.

"Since she was seen with you at the railway station, more than a week ago."

Frank drew a long breath.

"There goes the last plank," he said; "and Heaven help her!"

"Don't you know, then, Mr. Francis?" asked Gilbert, considerably puzzled.

"I!—Look here, Gilbert; the day I left home, I met Mary; no—you shall have it all—I made an appointment with the poor lass, with no ultimate object I swear; but she was turned away and homeless, and I had a sort of mad liking for the girl; I couldn't get away from her as it were. Well, I left her at Crewe, where the train stopped on its way up, not caring to take a girl to town, and went on to London alone, intending, Heaven help me, to return to her that same night. I think all that day I must have been mad; the fever was strong upon me, and even now I cannot recal clearly what passed. I remember quarrelling with Margaret, and then taking Mary on with me to Crewe, and there leaving her at an hotel, and going on. After that I am confused. I think I fell in with Wills, and we had a night of it; and then comes a blank, of which the only record I have remaining is a long hotel bill for nursing, and an

equally long doctor's bill for constant attendance on me. From their account, I must have had a jolly bad turn, and come very near to death's door. This morning I got up from that bed; I refused to listen to nurses and doctors; I couldn't bear any longer the suspense as to Mary's fate; she haunted me, and I threw myself, poor ailing wretch as you see me now, into the first down train, and arrived at Crewe. There I found out the hotel, but no Mary. The hostess in whose care I had left her, said the young woman had stayed two days, and seemed very restless and unhappy (poor little lass, what a heartless vagabond she must have thought me), and then paid the bill, and left, saying she was going home. I followed her, clinging to the last hope that she had returned to her friends; I have come straight from the station, and you tell me she has never been seen."

"Why, she was never looked for here, Mr. Francis," Gilbert said; "we all thought she was with you."

"I suppose so. I dare say my character and hers are inevitably spoilt here. Well, for myself the worst is over, and I don't care; only you, old boy, must know me as I am, and will perhaps some day clear me. You know too much of me to sup-

pose I laid any deliberate plan to entrap poor Mary. I struggled against the influence she had gained over me, and just as I had won the victory, I had that quarrel with Margaret, that set all my mad blood in a fever. I tell you, Gilbert, solemnly, I was no more master of my own actions, no more fit to be at large, than any inhabitant of Bedlam; why I might just as well have cut my own throat in that pleasant mood, as act as I did. They would have acknowledged it "temporary insanity," then; but they call this a harder name; they wouldn't believe it; even you, Gilbert, scarcely do. I tell you the fever had been in my blood for days since, it reached the acme, then, and seven or eight hours after I had committed a deed they dare to call deliberate, I lay a raving madman on a sick bed.

"Go to that place and hear the records of my pleasing behaviour on that occasion, and mark its sanity. Listen, as I did yesterday, to the revelations of my nurse. Mark how, as the clock struck the hour at which I had intended to return to Crewe, I, hearing it, tore, and raved, and foamed, and kept the three men on the premises in constant attendance to see that I didn't dash through the window into the street to keep my appointment. It sounds funny, doesn't it? But it wasn't. It

wasn't pleasant when I got up to have the fellows touching their caps, and telling me I was mortal hard to hold, and that they had three hours of it that night. It cost me a guinea a-piece, and all sorts of awkward feelings at meeting them again. I asked one, the boots, what I raved about, and the fellow owned, with a simper, it was all about a young woman named Mary whom I wanted to meet, and made such awful work because I couldn't go."

"But excuse me, sir, why did not these people write home when you lay ill? By Jove, you might have died!"

"They did not know me, Gilbert; and when they searched my pockets, finding I'd plenty of money (for I had called at the bank) to pay my way, did not trouble themselves to find out. But enough of myself and my doings; they are both so faulty that we will let them rest, Gilbert. Let us try to find out this poor girl. You say she has not been near home?"

"No."

"It was my only hope that she might have taken courage and come back, when I found she had gone," Frank said.

"You have, then, no proof that she left Crewe?"

"No; she was seen to go down to the station. It

seems strange to me, if she dare not go home, that she left the hotel at all. She might have been sure I should have returned there the first thing."

"Ah, Mr. Francis! you spoke of a landlady, and that is sufficient reason. The moment you leave two women together, there's no knowing what they may do; it is, to my thinking, very much the same as leaving two vicious animals in one cage—they'll fight, and the strongest will drive out the other," said Gilbert, shaking his head like a wiseacre, as, indeed, in his judgment of the other sex, he deemed himself. "When she saw you come back, of course she was all pleasant and smiling, and said Mary went of her own accord; but there is no knowing but what she was suspicious of the girl—it would look queer, you know, sir, leaving her, and promising to come back and never doing so, and women are very hard on women in such cases—and then, seeing Mary so low and miserable as the poor lass would be, thought she had best get rid of her, and told her to go."

"I've thought of that myself, Gilbert," replied Frank; "and it only makes me more anxious and unhappy about her."

"Had she any money, sir?"

"A little, I think, of her own; and I left her a couple of sovereigns, all I had at the time, in case she should want any."

Gilbert, having elicited this information, fell into a brown study, over the position in which the young master was placed. Mr. Francis evidently relied on him, had come to him for help in his difficulty, and he was not the man to fail through want of perseverance. Frank, knowing this, leant back patiently, waiting to hear some proposal. He felt easier now that some one else knew his trouble; it seemed as if he had halved the responsibility and lightened the load on his own shoulders. The sole knowledge, the consciousness that nothing could be done to rescue the girl but what he did with his own hands, had tortured him as he lay helpless on his bed, and goaded him to make an effort in his weakness. Now that he was putting another on the track, and one in whom he had great faith, the relief seemed almost comfort to him.

"I have thought it over, sir," said Gilbert, presently, "and I don't think it is likely she'll come home; the dread of meeting them would keep her back. The father is a violent man, and though the other lass, Esther, loved her dearly, and was almost like a mother to her—for the missus is a sad poor

dawdle in her way—she would not soon forgive Mary, for she has taken it very hardly.”

“Do you think she is still at Crewe?”

“I can only guess, and that is poor work at the best; but in case she should be near, I’ll make it easy for her to come back, by telling them at home how it was, and when she knows they feel kindly to her, she may take courage and come back.”

“By Jove, Gilbert, you are a fine fellow!”

“Don’t forget, Mr. Francis, I am only supposing. Maybe she can never come back; it is a fearful thing for a lass so young and pretty to be alone in a town.”

Frank sighed.

“I have tried to keep that chance out of my mind,” he said, with a shudder.

“It is a chance that must be considered though, sir,” said Gilbert, gravely. “Perhaps, if you wish it, I had better act in this matter. I am older, and could appear better in such an affair.”

“I wish you would, by Jove. You are the only one I can ask, and I could not manage it myself.”

“Very well, sir; I’ll do my best. I’ll go over to Crewe on my spare evenings. Of course I shall go about it as quietly as possible.”

“And spare no expense, Gilbert, in the search.”

"No, sir, I promise that, and—and if I should find her—excuse me, Mr. Francis, but it is necessary I should know—if I should find her, would you wish to see her again?"

Frank looked up, and a deep red blush came over his pale face; he hesitated a moment, and when he spoke, his voice was quite low, and had a tremor in it, not as though he hesitated in his meaning, but as though there lay a consciousness of a great weight of shame upon it.

"No, Gilbert, never again! With all my heart I wish her well, and could I at this moment command all my father's wealth, if it would make up the injury I have done her, she should have it all. I would throw aside all my prospects in life, Gilbert, as regards that, and start a poor man, to be able to recal, or blot from memory, the work of that miserable day! But that is all, there is nothing more; a host of pity and kindly feeling for the poor little lass, but nothing more, Gilbert; no love, no nonsense; all that gendered with the fever, grew as it grew, reached its climax with it, and quitted me with it! I have no wish to see her again."

Ah! Heaven help thee, poor Mary. And could this be true? Was this the end of all the struggling and all the love? Indifference! Could that face no

longer charm him? He had thought of it, lying on his sick bed, when the fever had quitted him, and yet his pulse kept its quiet, feeble pace; his heart its measured beat. Nay, a smile had come upon his face, and much wonder possessed him that it could ever have moved him so, have excited those wild throbs, those fierce struggles against temptation. He thought himself quite old now, and must have been a boy when he felt the pangs, and looked back with the simple wonder with which we regard our wild, impulsive boyhood, when we have reached the time when a good dinner and a soft bed are the only things that interest us.

This little confession made, Frank hurried from it.

"I am not going home, Gilbert," he said. "I shall write to my father and ease his mind, and then go back to London, and on to Paris, and begin the journey I meditated. I will keep you acquainted with every change of residence I make, and you must keep me up to every move you make in this matter. And when you succeed—for succeed I know you will, dear old boy—you must tell me what you think had best be done."

He held out his hand, and Gilbert grasped it.

"We are fast friends again?" asked Frank.

"Yes, sir ; and I am sorry I ever thought wrong of you," Gilbert answered.

"Now, then, I must be off. First, though, give me some writing materials. I shall tell my father of the charge you have accepted, and I dare say he will speak to you in the morning about it."

Gilbert gave him what he wished, and, seeing him make a faint ineffectual attempt to rise, drew the table to him.

"I scarcely know how weak I am till I try my strength," Frank said, faintly.

"You are not fit to travel, sir ; you must not think of going to-night. My bed is at your service."

"Thank you, Gilbert ; but I cannot accept it. I do not care about being seen in the vicinity till this little affair has been forgotten. It is now nine ; and my train goes at ten."

He pulled the paper towards him, and Gilbert, thinking he would rather be alone while he wrote, went downstairs.

Left to himself, Frank set to his letter at once. He wrote shortly and concisely ; he said all he had to say, but he troubled his father with no heroics ; he simply stated facts, and when they were exhausted, his letter was ended, and sealed ; and directed in his usual firm, clear handwriting.

This done, he took another sheet of paper, and then paused. The impulse was to write to Margaret to tell her of his repentance and his grief; not to ask her forgiveness, but to show how, among all her desolation, there was still one to love her, one who loved her now a hundred times better than before he had put the barrier between them. He had thought to make no promise, only to say that, and trust to time to efface the recollection of his fault. But an afterthought made him push aside the paper.

"No, no; I cannot do it; it is better it should remain undone. Margaret must have another comforter. Of my own will I threw aside that right; it has passed from me, and I can never reclaim it. God bless her!" He bowed his head for a moment, thinking of what he had lost, thinking of the noble girl whose love he had wantonly spurned, and then he laughed his old bitter, reckless laugh. "I am Cain! I am going forth to wander from my home with the brand upon my soul! Here, Gilbert!" he sang out, "it is time we were off, my lad, or I shall miss my train. I am so much in advance of my original, that he went on foot, and I go by steam."

Gilbert came in, and gave Mr. Francis his arm downstairs to the cab that he had kept waiting.

At the station, as Frank took his place, and Gilbert stood leaning with his arm upon the carriage-door, a thought struck him.

"Mr. Francis, I cannot rest easy seeing you go away so unfit for travel; let me come with you."

Frank shook his head.

"Remember the work I've left you to do, my lad. It is more important to me than my own safety. You can't think the load you have taken off my mind by accepting the charge. For myself, I'm all right, or shall be presently."

Still Gilbert stood unsatisfied, watching the last comers rush to and fro, collecting luggage and getting tickets, and yet occupied with his own thoughts. We have all known what it is to stand on the platform waiting to see a friend off; we have nothing to say; our last message has been delivered, and most probably forgotten; it is no good saying good-bye till the last whistle sounds, so we turn and watch those about us.

At last the signal came.

"Good-bye, old fellow!" said Frank, putting forth his hand.

Gilbert grasped it.

"God bless you, sir!"

He stood back as the train moved slowly on, and

watched it till it had passed out from the station, and sped into the darkness beyond.

“He has gone, trusting me with his charge,” pondered Gilbert, as he went home.

Ah! that charge! Where was she? Did she lie where yon black river runs its course, blackened by a thousand dies? Did it flow over her, and, in its blackness and depth, keep her secret only too surely? Or was she where yonder lights gleam brightly in the dark night, where light and gaiety seem only mockery, and hope lies as surely deadened as 'neath the black river itself?

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